

# AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

DR. KAWTHAR MUSTAFA

AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE ● DR. KAWTHAR MUSTAFA

**RAMON**

This book in its original form was a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of M.Phil. degree in Philosophy, Aligarh Muslim University, India. The main purpose of this book is the elaboration of al-Ghazali's views on the different aspects relating to the theory of knowledge. In doing this, attempt has been made to present Ghazalian notion of knowledge, and to deduce his views on the sources, nature and validity of knowledge. In the field of knowledge al-Ghazālī's approach has been found multi-dimensional. Perhaps, owing to the lack of an in-depth study, a view was prevalent among some scholars that al-Ghazālī undermined rational and empirical approaches to knowledge, that ultimately resulted in the decline of sciences in Islam. This book discards this view and proves that reason, sense-perception, and synthesis of reason and sense-perception along with intuition or mystic experience (*kashf*) have been accommodated in al-Ghazali's theory of knowledge.

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AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

## Foreword

I am really happy to write a few words about the book – *Al-Ghazali's Theory of Knowledge* – written by my dear student Dr. Kawthar Mustafa, now an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Dhaka. Imam al-Ghazali is one of the few human persons for whom the world of knowledge as a whole can rightly be proud of. He was a master genius and knowledgeable in almost all the major branches of knowledge of the day. He was and still is considered the most comprehensive writer and an acknowledged authority of the highest order on Sufism both in academic and practical terms.

The statement — if all the books written on Islam are destroyed save those of Imam al-Ghazali, hardly anything important on Islamics is really lost — encapsulates the comprehensiveness of the contents of his writings as well as their enormous influence on the subsequent course of Islamic history, civilization and culture. This is also indicative of the profound respect he enjoys with his fellow Muslims after the elapse of so many centuries. From philosophical point of view, the most important contribution of a major thinker lies in what he builds his system of thought on and how this is built : and precisely this is his theory of knowledge. To venture to unfathom this most important foundational aspect of a master mind like al-Ghazali is undoubtedly a very courageous step in itself. Mr. Kawthar Mustafa as a promising young scholar made this attempt and I am happy to note that he has come out successful. This was an intellectual challenge in view of the fact that on this count al-Ghazali has been misunderstood very sadly : he was discredited with a completely unfounded allegation that he denied the empirical and rational aspects in the cognitive process, which as the critics contend, 'ultimately resulted in the decline of sciences in Islam' as Dr. Kawthar Mustafa correctly captures. Dr. Kawthar Mustafa has been able to refute this wrong notion. He has argued persuasively on rational ground and in this process has also given extensive references to the writings of both—the critics' themselves and Ghazali's. Dr. Kawthar Mustafa has succeeded in establishing the claim that al-Ghazali has the most comprehensive understanding of the sources of knowledge that in fact, Islam entertains: sense experience, reason, intuition and wahy (revelation in Islamic sense). My well considered view is that Dr. Kawthar Mustafa is competent to handle the matter in the way that it really deserves in that he has the basic training in Western philosophy, he comes of a Sufi family background (his father is an eminent Sufi Master) and he himself is a practising Sufi.

Many books and articles have been written on different aspects of al-Ghazali's thoughts over centuries. But, as indicated, his real position on epistemology did not get proper treatment in any of these writings. This was, indeed, a great lacuna in the corpus of literature on al-Ghazali. Needless to say, this was also a great historical injustice done to him. The conscious members of the Muslim Ummah should have reacted and responded to this allegation centuries earlier but it did not happen like that.

I heartily congratulate Dr. Kawthar Mustafa that he has fulfilled this gap, freed the Ummah from the above historical guilt it has suffered from and paid of the intellectual and spiritual debts it owes to Imam al-Ghazali. I feel elated that one of my dear students has been able to accomplish this wonderful task. I pray to Almighty Allah (SWT) to accept the book and to include its author among His chosen ones. I also wish the book the widest possible circulation.

Dhaka  
10 January, 2003

Professor Dr. Anisuzzaman  
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## *Dedication*

*Dedicated to the Sacred Memory of Hadrat Syed Shah Muhammad Faruq Qaderi Abululayee (c. 1905-1985 AD) Rahmatullahealaihe who was the Spiritual Guide of my father and my own Spiritual Guide Hadrat Shah Muhammad Mizanur Rahman Faruqi Chishti Abululayee (born in 1917 AD).*

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## PREFACE

Praise be to Allah, As I believe, He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. Allah's peace and blessings be upon the Prophet of Islam, the Chosen and Beloved, and on his Descendants, his House, his Companions and Saints of his community, who guide men to truth and deliver them from error.

Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 AD) needs no introduction to the students of Muslim Philosophy. His contribution to the different aspects of Islamics earned him the honorific titles of *Hujjat ul-Islam* (proof of Islam) and *Zain ad-Din* (ornament of religion). It is reported that al-Ghazālī lost his father at a very young age. He and his younger brother Ahmad were then brought up and educated by a ṣūfī friend of their father that ultimately, according to a number of his biographers, influenced him to adopt the path of ṣūfism in the later phase of his life.

Al-Ghazālī in a comparatively young age succeeded to have a comprehensive knowledge of an extensive range of subjects, in particular, theology, jurisprudence, science, philosophy, apologetics, logic and mysticism; and became acquainted with the system of thought of the leading intellectual and religious movements of his time. Whatever al-Ghazālī studied, his approach remained critical and reflective. He tried to remain objective even to the views he opposed that appealed to all, irrespective of caste, colour and creed, to study his works. In al-Ghazālī we find anticipations of some ideas of some modern philosophers, e.g. those of, Descartes (method of doubt), Hume (causal principles), Kant (phenomena – noumena distinction) etc. Even his critical attitudes towards the Muslim Philosophers' rational approach to metaphysics have some resemblance with the views of the logical positivists of the twentieth century. He seriously sought to arrive at truth. The flame of al-Ghazālī's quest for truth ultimately quenched by the light of revelation leavened with mysticism.

A good number of research works have been done in different aspects of al-Ghazālī's philosophy, and many books and articles on his thoughts are available in almost all the leading languages of the world. However, his theory of knowledge, which is undoubtedly a significant contribution to epistemology, so far my knowledge goes, has hitherto been ignored. To fulfil this great lacuna in the study of al-Ghazālī's philosophy, I ventured to work on this and decided to write my M. Phil. dissertation entitled, "A Critical Study of al-Ghazālī's Epistemology" at Aligarh Muslim University. I successfully defended my thesis and was

awarded the degree in 1987. *Al-hamdulillah*, I am happy that after the elapse of all these years the thesis in going to be published in the form of a book. To give the thesis the shape of a book some stylistic modifications have been made. In this connection I should mention that a portion of the chapter-II was published in the form of an article entitled, "Non-Mystical Aspects in al-Ghazālī's Epistemology" in *Social Science Review*, Dhaka University, Vol. 17, No.1, June, 2000. For that I am thankful to the Editor of the Journal.

I gratefully remember the memories of Late Professor Syed Waheed Akhtar, the then Chairman, Department of Philosophy and Dean, Faculty of Arts, Aligarh Muslim University under whose competent supervision I had the privilege to complete this humble work. I am also happy to mention in passing that I also did my Ph. D. thesis under him. I also fondly remember the kindness of Dr. Anzarul Haque, who was initially entrusted as my supervisor, but whose sudden death necessitated the above change. I pray to the Ever Forgiving Allah for the salvation of their departed souls.

I recall the sweet memory of my revered teacher Late Professor Saiyed Abdul Hai, former Chairman, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Dhaka, whose directions and teachings have the immense impact upon my total being. I also remember my teachers in the University of Dhaka Late National Professor Dewan Md. Azraf and Late Professor Abdul Jalil Mia for their very strong recommendation letters for my admission in M. Phil. leading to Ph. D. Programme in the Aligarh Muslim University. May Allah keep their souls in eternal rest! I am thankful to my teachers, Professor Abdul Matin, Professor Aminul Islam, Professor A. Q. Fazlul Wahid and Professor Anisuzzaman for their deep interest in my academic activities I should also thank my esteemed friend Mr. Fariduddin Khan for his eagerness to see the book published in time.

I am grateful to the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, for awarding the fellowship to pursue my research work and also to the Ministry of Education, Government of Bangladesh for selecting me under Indo-Bangladesh cultural exchange programmes.

I am thankful to Syed Rahmatullah, proprietor, Ramon Publishers for taking the responsibility of publishing this work, and to Mr. Panu Gopal for Computer Compose and Mr. Maksudul Hassan for Page Make-up.

During my long stay at Aligarh, my beloved parents missed me so seriously. Their sacrifices, love and blessings are interwoven in the fabric of what I am today.

– Kawthar Mustafa

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## Introduction

Theory of knowledge, the technical term of which is Epistemology, it is well-known, is one of the main branches of philosophy. Although for more than two thousand years, it has been occupying a highly considerable place in philosophy, its significance has yet not been, anyway, dimmed. If a comparison is made between ancient and modern epistemology, we will notice an evidential difference in their approach and methodology. But, the problems of epistemology, to a large extent, have remained unchanged. The term 'epistemology' derives from the Greek word *episteme*, meaning knowledge. And, thus, epistemology is that branch of philosophy which deals with the problems, pertaining to the origin (i.e. sources), nature and validity of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Our aim, in this monograph, is to make a through study of al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. Before entering into this we may give a historical sketch of epistemology i.e. theory of knowledge, starting from Greek philosophy down to the pre-Ghazalian Muslim thought.

### 1. Epistemology in Greek Philosophy

The pre-Socratic philosophers, the earliest philosophers of the Western tradition, did not give any fundamental attention to this branch of philosophy, for they were primarily concerned with the nature and possibility of change. They took it for granted that knowledge of nature was possible, although some of them suggested that knowledge of the structure of reality could better come from some other sources. Thus, Heraclitus (fl. 504 B.C.) emphasized the use of the senses, and Parmenides (fl. 501 B.C.) put stress on the role of reason. But none of them doubted that knowledge of reality was possible.<sup>2</sup> Xenophanes (fl. 540 B.C.), as

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1. Harold H. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, 3rd ed. New York: American Book Company Ltd., 1953, p. 38.
  2. Paul Edwards, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., New York: The Macmillan Co. & The Free Press, Vol. 3, 1967, p. 9.

his surviving fragments are explained by the later writers, seems to have a sceptical view with regard to the possibility of human knowledge.<sup>3</sup> He also explicitly denies the possibility of knowledge of divine revelation.<sup>4</sup> Parmenides, on the other hand, holds that knowledge can be acquired by divine revelation, and makes it clear that such knowledge is something wholly distinct from what common sense regards as knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Democritus, the most prominent figure among the Atomists, appears to have some concern about knowledge.<sup>6</sup> For the explanation of the sensible qualities he emphasizes the need for differences in shapes; and it would be without reason according to him, to deny differences in size, as well as to restrict the amount of the difference.<sup>7</sup> Sceptical attitude toward the possibility of the knowledge of reality chiefly emerged in the philosophy of the Sophists who raised the question that how much of what we think we know about nature is really an objective part of it and how much is contributed by the human mind.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, do we have any knowledge of the nature as it really is? Protagoras (about b. 483 B.C.), seems to have held, as reported by Plato, that every thing is as it appears to a man, that appearances are the only reality. His famous dictum is "man is the measure of all thing, of the things that are, that they are, of the things that are not, that they are not."<sup>9</sup> Gorgias' view is more radical, according to him, there is no such thing as reality, if there is, we could not know of it, and that even we could know of it, we could not communicate our knowledge of it.

This general sceptical attitude towards knowledge led to the beginning of epistemology as it has been traditionally known—the

3. D. J. O'Connor, ed. *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, London, The Free Press of Glencoe Collier-Macmillan Ltd. 1964, p. 7.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

5. *Loc. cit.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

7. Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937, p. 36.

8. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 9.

9. O'Connor, *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, p. 13.

attempt to justify the claim that knowledge is possible and to assess the part played by the senses and reason in the acquisition of knowledge. Plato (C-428-347 B.C.) is considered by almost all the philosophers as the real originator of epistemology, for he attempted to deal with the basic question: What is knowledge? Where is knowledge generally found, and how much of what we ordinarily think we know is really knowledge? Do the senses provide knowledge? Can reason supply knowledge? What is the relation between knowledge and true belief?<sup>10</sup> In connection with the sources of knowledge Plato was not ready to accept the role of sense-experience. He reserved the term "knowledge" for a kind of awareness or acquaintance with a world of quite distinct entities called forms which lies beyond the reach of the senses.<sup>11</sup>

Aristotle (389-322 B.C.), like Plato, maintains that knowledge is always of the universal. In so far as we claim to know particular things, we know them as instances of a universal in the particular. But it must be clarified that, as Aristotle holds, universals are inherent in particulars; he strongly rejects the Platonic notion of a world of separate Universals or Forms. The only exception to the inherence of forms in 'matter' and God and the most divine part of us, reason is in the highest sense. Knowledge, therefore, depends ultimately on the soul's or mind's reception of the forms of things.<sup>12</sup>

Aristotle maintains that higher faculties depend for their existence on the lower. The exercise of the intellect, which is in itself nothing but a mere faculty, depends on the prior exercise of sense-perception. Hence, Aristotle says, the soul never thinks without an image. This notion of Aristotle has often been conceived as the basis of empiricism.<sup>13</sup>

It is said that if any one in the ancient period was an empiricist, it was Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), the leading Greek atomist.

10. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 9.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Epicurus insists upon the fact that all knowledge rests upon sensation. Sensations are the result of contact with a sense organ on the part of "eidola", i.e., films of atoms, given off by objects. Sensation is thus immediate and admits of no check. Hence, it is useless to look for any other source of knowledge, he seems to have held that in some sense every sensation is true.<sup>14</sup>

The Stoic School was the another important school of thought in Greek Philosophy which showed some interest in epistemological problems. Zeno (fl. c. 300 B.C.) was the founder of that school, but the main figure was, perhaps Chrysippus (C. 280-C.204 B.C.). The Stoics not only rejected the Platonic doctrine of the transcendental universal, but also, Aristotle's doctrine of the concrete universal. Only the individual exists and our knowledge is knowledge of particular objects. These particulars make an impression on the soul, and knowledge is primarily knowledge of this impression.<sup>15</sup> The Stoic stand was, therefore, empiricist, even "sensualistic". However, they also maintained a rationalism which is scarcely consistent with a thoroughly empiricist and nominalist position. For, they hold that reason is a product of development, in that it grows up gradually out of perceptions and is formed only about the fourteenth year. They also maintain that not only there are deliberately formed general ideas, but also such general ideas as are apparently antecedent to experience in that – we have a natural predisposition to form them – virtually 'innate ideas', as we may call them. What is more, it is only through the reason that the system of reality can be known.<sup>16</sup>

The sceptics were making attacks upon the dogmatic schools, as they called them. The general tendency of this school was to accept the doctrine of impressions and *phantasiae*. The arguments they put against dogmatism were initially unsystematic, but gradually they got an orderly shape. Probably,

under Aenesidemus (first century B.C.) a list of ten (or eight) arguments was drawn up. Some of these were forms of the argument from illusion, stressing the possibility of illusion and error in order to suggest that there was no reason to think that we ever gain knowledge of the real truths about things. Perceptions, they said, are always relative to the circumstances, the perceiver and so on. Hence, no *phantasia* is a criterion of truth, and nothing else can be.<sup>17</sup>

Plotinus, the founder of the Neoplatonic school, was responsible for the revival of Platonism in the third century A.D. This movement was mystical in its trend. Nevertheless, Plotinus often used Aristotelian notions, sometimes with Platonic twist. The soul, as opposed to body, is given pre-eminence, so that perception and knowledge make the soul function.<sup>18</sup> Porphyry (A.D. 232/3) set himself to propound the doctrine of Plotinus in a clear and comprehensive manner, but his interest was more in the practical and religious aspects than even what Plotinus had done. The end of philosophy, to him, is 'salvation', and the soul must purify itself by turning its attention from what is lower to what is higher, a purification to be accomplished by asceticism and knowledge of God.<sup>19</sup>

Augustine (354-430 A.D.) was influenced by Neoplatonism, although he held a significantly different view on the heterodox views of it. He took it for granted that knowledge of God was possible, and he felt no further need to question this assumption.<sup>20</sup> Augustine's plea for the possibility of reliable knowledge proceeds along with two fronts. He makes distinction between two kinds of objects and their two corresponding kinds of knowledge. Accordingly, there are two classes of things known; one consisting of these which the mind perceives through the bodily senses, and the other, of those which it perceives through itself. The first receives the objects of the five senses, that is, the material world, while the second is related to the intelligible

14. O'Connor, *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, p. 65.

15. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1956, p. 386.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

17. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 14.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

19. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 473.

20. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 14.

world, known by the mind independently of sense-experience. Among the objects of this second mode of knowledge is included the mind itself, which according to Augustine, was known to itself without the intermediary of any sense-experience.<sup>21</sup> In describing the discovery of self-knowledge, Augustine maintains that as the mind's discovery of itself in the very process of seeking itself, is not as an object it comes across but as the subject and agent of its intellectual quest.<sup>22</sup> All knowledge, Augustine points out, is the work of the soul. This he defines as a "substance endowed with reason and fitted to rule the body."<sup>23</sup>

### 1. Epistemology in Pre-Ghazalian Muslim Thought

Before making any attempt to elucidate the views of the different Muslim thinkers in connection with the problem of epistemology, it will be perhaps proper to see whether the main two sources of Muslim philosophy – the Qur'ān and the Hadith do have any say on this problem. In the Qur'ān some references are made in connection with human knowledge. Man alone has been given the capacity to use names for things<sup>24</sup> and so has been endowed the knowledge which even the angels do not possess.<sup>25</sup> Among men those who are granted wisdom are indeed granted great good.<sup>26</sup> The aim of the intellect is to know truth from error. As an ideal or basic virtue for man, wisdom means the knowledge of facts, ideals, and values.

M.M. Sharif with reference to the Qur'ānic verses holds that there are three degrees of knowledge in the ascending scale of certitude. (i) Knowledge by inference ('*ilm al-yaqīn*'),<sup>27</sup> (ii) knowledge by perception and reported perception or observation ('*ain al-yaqīn*'),<sup>28</sup> and (iii) knowledge by personal experience

21. O'Connoer, *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 84-85.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

23. *Loc. cit.*

24. Qur'an - 2:31 (In case translation of the verses given here we have mainly followed Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an)

25. *Ibid.*, 2:32.

26. *Ibid.*, 2:269.

27. *Ibid.*, 102:5.

28. *Ibid.*, 102:7.

(*haqq al-yaqīn*)<sup>29</sup> – a distinction which may be illustrated by my certitude of (1) water always quenches (2) it has quenched Zaid's thirst, (3) it has quenched my thirst. Likewise, there are three types of errors: (i) The errors of reasoning, (ii) the errors of observation and (iii) the errors of intuition. Prof. M.M. Sharif elucidates the above mentioned three degrees of the Qur'ānic concept of knowledge.<sup>30</sup> The first type of knowledge depends either on the truth of its presupposition as in deduction, or it is only probable as in induction. There is greater certitude about our knowledge based on experience (observation or experiment) of phenomena.

The second type of knowledge is either scientific knowledge based on experience (observation and experiment) or historical knowledge based on reports or descriptions of actual experiences. All reports are not trust worthy. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the character of the reporter. If he is a suspicious person, his report should not be accepted without a careful examination.<sup>31</sup>

The source of scientific knowledge is the study of natural phenomena. These natural phenomena are the signs of Allah.<sup>32</sup> They symbolize the ultimate reality or express the truth, as human behaviour is the expression of the human mind. The study of nature, of the heavens and earth, enlightens the men of understanding.<sup>33</sup> The alteration of day and night makes them capable to measure serial time.<sup>34</sup> They can know the ways of Allah, the laws of nature by keenly observing all things of varying colours—mountains, rivers, fields of corn, or other form of vegetation, gardens of olives, date-palms, grapes, and fruit of all kinds, thereof watered with the same water, whereas they vary in their qualities.<sup>35</sup> By studying birds as they move in the sky and

29. *Ibid.*, 69:51.

30. M.M. Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, Vol. 1, 1963, pp. 147, 48, 49, 50.

31. Qur'an, 49:6

32. *Ibid.*, 2:164, 219; 3:190; 6:95-99; 10:3-6; 13:2-4; 17:12; 30:20-27; 45:3-6.

33. *Ibid.*, 3:190.

34. *Ibid.*, 3:190; 7:12.

35. *Ibid.*, 16:11; 13:16.

thinking how they set up in such a way<sup>36</sup> and similarly by observing the clouds and meditating how they are made.<sup>37</sup> Those who reflect can know Allah and can acquire the capacity of conquering all that is in the heavens and the earth:<sup>38</sup> night and day, and the sun, the moon, and the stars,<sup>39</sup> knowledge of the phenomenal world which comes through the senses should not be treated as an illusion, but be understood as blessing for which we must be thankful.<sup>40</sup>

Allah reveals His signs not only in the experience of the outer world (*āfāq*) and its historical vistas, but also through the inner experience of minds (*anfus*). Thus, the inner or the personal experience is the third source of knowledge. Experience from this source gives the highest degree of certitude. Divine guidance<sup>41</sup> comes to the creatures in the first instance from this source. The forms of knowledge that come through this source are

- (1) divinely-determined movement – movement determined by natural causes, as in the earth,<sup>42</sup> and the heavens<sup>43</sup>
- (2) Instinct, e.g. in the bee to build its cell.
- (3) intuition or knowledge by the heart<sup>44</sup>
- (4) inspiration as in the case of Moses' mother when she cast her tenderly suckled child into the river<sup>45</sup>
- (5) revelation as in the case of all true prophets,<sup>46</sup> God's messengers.

About knowledge some references are, also, found in the traditions of the Prophet(s). Intellect (*'aql*) is considered by the Prophet as a very significant thing in religion. So many sayings

36. *Ibid.*, 24:41; 67:19.

37. *Ibid.*, 39:43.

38. *Ibid.*, 16:14; 45:13.

39. *Ibid.*, 16:12.

40. *Ibid.*, 16:78; 32:9.

41. *Ibid.*, 2:38.

42. *Ibid.*, 50:7-8; 51:20.

43. *Ibid.*, 41:12.

44. *Ibid.*, 16:68.

45. *Ibid.*, 28:7.

46. *Ibid.*, 4:163-64; 42:15.

are found in connection with the significance of intellect and its application. The Prophet said: Allah has not created anything more honourable than intellect. Dr. Iqbal considers that the search for rational foundations in Islam may be regarded to have begun with the Prophet(s) himself. His constant prayer was: Allah grant me! knowledge of ultimate nature of things.<sup>47</sup> "Wisdom is the believer's straying camel; he takes it from whatever he takes it from whatever he may find it, and does not care from what vessel it has been issued," the philosophers of Islam like the theologians, had no difficulty in finding the appropriate sayings of the Prophet to justify their activities. This tradition also suggests the possibility of the different sources of knowledge.

Apart from the Qur'ān and Traditions of the Prophet(s), Amīr-ul-Mu'minīn 'Alī also discussed the problems of knowledge. According to him, "knowledge is of two kinds, natural and acquired, acquired knowledge is useless without the other, just as the light of the sun rendered useless, when the light of the eye is closed."<sup>48</sup>

If we have a look at the different schools that emerged in the history of Muslim philosophy we see four main schools, e.g. Mu'tazilism, Ash'arism Philosophers (*Falasifa*) and Sūfism, which seem to have some concern on epistemological problems. Apart from these four schools there is another school – the *Ikhwān as-safā* which made significant contribution to epistemology. Regarding the sources of knowledge the schools hold different views but all of them accept the authenticity of revelation; the main point of their controversy on this issue arose on the interpretation of revelation. The Mu'tazilas and the

47. Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, printed in India, Delhi, Bombay, Madras: Oriental Publishers Distributors, 1975, p.3.

48. Al-Ghazālī, quotes this saying of Hadrat 'Alī, in his *Ihyā 'Ulūm id-Dīn*, Eng. Tr. Fazlul Karim, New Delhi: Kitab Bhawan, 1982, Vol. I, p. 115. For a detailed study of Amīr ul-Mu'minīn 'Alī's views on knowledge one may study *Nahj al-Balāghah*, translations of which are available in Urdu, English, Persian and many other languages.

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philosophers hold that reason is competent enough to explain and interpret the different verses of the Qur'ān. The Ash'ariyas maintain that *Kalām* (i.e., demonstrative reason) has to be applied in explaining them. The real difference between the Mu'tazilah and the Ash'ariah is as to which is prior, reason or revelation. The Mu'tazilas are inclined toward a more rationalist approach than the Ash'ariyas. The Sūfis on the otherhand put stress on the role of intuition (*Kashf*) in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. But on the whole, Sūfis were not totally averse to reason. Some Sūfis developed rigorously rationalist systems of ideas, though they mainly relied upon mystic experience. For instance, al-Ghazālī regards intuition (*Kashf*) as a higher form of reason. We may now, give a brief account of the epistemological position of the above mentioned main schools of Muslim philosophy.

**MU'TAZILISM**

The main problems that were taken up by Mu'tazilism were in defence of the Unity of Allah and His justice. This is why, they are termed as "people of unity and justice" (*ahl a-tawhīd wa'l-'adl*).<sup>49</sup> They put special stress on reason—they regard reason as the principal guideline for apprehending the true spirit of revelation. But they do not undermine the significance of revelation, rather their insistence on reason is based on the Qur'ān. Revelation and reason, to the Mu'tazilas, are the sources of knowledge and criteria of distinguishing between good and evil. Therefore, they must be in harmony. But if there appears any inconsistency between reason and literal meaning of revelation, the literal meaning should be cast aside and some deep meaning, which conforms to reason, should be sought out.<sup>50</sup> Thus, reason has got a better position in their system of thought than the traditional authoritarian approach to revelation.

49. Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. 1

50. Saiyed Abdul Hai, *Muslim Philosophy*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Vol. 1, 2nd ed., 1982, p. 76.

**ASH'ARISM**

Ash'arism emerged as a philosophico-religious school of thought in Islam during the fourth and fifth A.H./tenth and eleventh centuries A.D. It laid the foundation of an orthodox Islamic theology or orthodox *kalām*, as opposed to the rationalist *kalām* of the Mu'tazilas. They also opposed the stand of the extreme orthodox class, and made endeavour to use dialectical method for the defence of the authority of divine revelation.<sup>51</sup> This school, maintains an intermediary position where there will be a harmonious co-existence between revelation and reason. But revelation without being a subject to rational justification got higher status in the system of thought of the Ash'ariyas. Mu'tazilas made attempt to grasp reality by reason alone; it implied the identity of the spheres of religion and philosophy, and strove to express faith in the form of concepts or terms of pure thought. Ash'arism applied its dialectical method to the defence of the authority of Divine revelation.<sup>52</sup>

**PHILOSOPHERS**

The Philosophers (*Falasifah*, singular *Faylasūf*) are known for the introduction of Greek philosophy in the intellectual world of Islam. The word *Faylasūf* is an Arabic equivalent of the Greek word 'Philosopher'. The Arabic writers give this name to those thinkers who were inspired by Greek Philosophy or whose thought had a close affinity with Greek Philosophy.<sup>53</sup>

The school started with Arab Philosopher al-Kindī (260 A.H./873 A.D.) and continued to flourish even after Ibn Rushd, (595 A.H./1198 A.D.), particularly in Iranian School of *Hikmah*, the most distinguished representative of which was Mullā Sadr ud-Dīn Shīrāzī, popularly known as Mulla Sadrā. This school deserves special attention in the context of our present study,

51. Sharif, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

52. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Lahore: Bezm-e Iqbal, 1959, p. 54.

53. Hai, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

because some of its prominent representatives made significant contributions to epistemology.

Although al-Kindī was the first Arab thinker of the Greek tradition, who highlighted the role of reason in human knowledge, he was a firm believer in the prophetic revelation. As he says, 'By my life, the utterance of Muhammad the true, and the message that he delivered from Almighty Allah—that is all ascertainable by intellectual processes, which are rejected by none but those deprived of the form of reason.'<sup>54</sup> Human sciences, al-Kindī says, are acquired by man through research, effort and industry. These sciences fall short in rank of the divine science (*al-'ilm-ilāhī*) which is obtained without research, effort and industry, and in no time. This latter knowledge is the knowledge of the Prophets, a knowledge bestowed by Allah.<sup>55</sup> This is unlike the knowledge of logic and mathematics.<sup>56</sup> Thus, he made a distinction between revealed knowledge and acquired knowledge through human effort which includes the employment of both reason and sense-perception.

Al-Fārābī (d. 339 A.H./950 A.D.) is another most important figure among the Muslim Philosophers. Like al-Kindī, he gives due reverence to prophethood and tries to conciliate reason and revelation. His theory of prophethood may be considered to be one of the most significant attempts at the reconciliation of philosophy and religion. The distinction, he made, between rational conception and sense-perception is that the former is a kind of intuition or inspiration or in other words, it is a kind of immediate apprehension. This is the noblest level of human apprehension, and it is reached only by the few and the select who attain to the level of the acquired intellect, where the hidden is unveiled, and come in direct communion with the world of separate intelligences.<sup>57</sup>

54. Al-Kindī, *Fi Kamiya Kutub Aristutalis* ed. Abu Rida, quoted A.J. Arberry's *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1957, p. 35.

55. Sharif, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 463.

57. Al-Fārābī, *Al-Ṭḥamārat al-Mardīyyah and al-Madinat al-Fadilah*, cf. Sharif's *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 461.

Thus, intellect is capable of rising gradually from intellect in potency to intellect in action, and finally to the level of acquired intellect. While intellect in potency is merely a receiver of sensible forms, intellect in action retains the intelligibles and comprehends the concepts. The acquired intellect rises to the level of communion, ecstasy and inspiration.<sup>58</sup> Communion with the agent intelligence is possible through two ways: contemplation and inspiration. The soul rises through study and quest to the level of the acquired intellect when it becomes the recipient of the divine light. This level can be achieved only by the sacred spirits of the philosophers and sages, who can penetrate through the unseen and perceive the "world of light". The sacred soul, preoccupied with what is above, gives no need to what is below and its external sensation never overwhelms its internal sensation. It receives knowledge direct from the High Spirit and angels without any human instruction.<sup>59</sup> Thus, through continuous speculative studies, a sage gets into communion with the agent intelligence.

Al-Fārābī maintains that the chief characteristic of a prophet is to have a vivid imagination through which he can commune with the agent intelligence during waking time and in sleep, and can attain vision and inspiration. And revelation is but an emanation from Allah through the agent intelligence. Some persons, although in a lower degree than the prophets, have a powerful insight through which he can have a inferior kind of vision and inspiration.<sup>60</sup> In this way, al-Fārābī considers the rank of saints a degree lower than that of prophets. Thus, he makes an attempt to explain prophecy on rational grounds and gives it an epistemological dimension.

Ibn Miskawaih (d. 421 A.H./1030 A.D.) is another pre-Ghazalian Muslim Philosopher who made significant contribution to epistemology as well as to other branches of philosophy. According to him, all human knowledge begins from

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 461-62.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 463.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 465.

sensations which are gradually transformed into perceptions. The earlier stages of intellection are completely conditioned by the presence of an external reality. But the progress of knowledge means to be able to think without being conditioned by matter. Thought begins with matter, but it will not remain confined to matter itself rather its object is to gradually free itself from the primary condition of its own possibility.<sup>61</sup> In the formation of concepts thought reaches a still higher stage in respect of freedom from materiality. Concept being the result of comparison and assimilation of percepts, cannot be regarded as having completely freed itself from the gross cause of sensations. But it should also not lead one to ignore the basic difference between the nature of the concept and percept. The individual (percept) is constantly a subject to change. The knowledge of individuals, therefore, lacks the element of permanence. The universal (concept), on the other hand, is not affected by the law of change. There are changes in the individual but the universal remains intact. It is the essence of matter to submit to the law of change. As the change is related to matter if a thing succeeds to reduce its attachment with matter its changing nature will also be equally reduced. Allah, therefore, being absolutely free from matter, is absolutely changeless; and it is His complete freedom from materiality that makes our conception of Him difficult or impossible.<sup>62</sup>

Ibn Sina (d. 428 A.H./1037 A.D.) is accredited among the great Muslim philosophers to build an elaborate and complete system of philosophy, a system which has been dominant in the Muslim Philosophical tradition for centuries. His theory of knowledge is considered to be a significant contribution to Muslim philosophy. In accordance with the universal Greek tradition, Ibn Sina considers all knowledge as some sort of abstraction on the part of the cognizant of the form of the thing known. About sense-perception his view is that the very presence

61. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, p. 25; M. Abdul Haq Ansari, *The Ethical philosophy of Miskawaih*, Aligarh: Muslim University Press, 1964, p. 63.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

of matter is required for its cognitive act. Imagination is free from the presence of actual matter but it needs the material attachments and incidents which give to the image of its particularity, whereas in intellect alone the pure form is cognized in its universality.<sup>63</sup>

Ibn Sina was a believer in divine revelation. He sought to establish it at four levels: the "intellectual", the "imaginative", the "miraculous", and the "socio-political". The totality of the four levels evinces a clear indication of his religious motivation, character, and direction of thinking. In his doctrine of prophecy, he made drastic modification of the Muslim dogmatic theology by declaring that the Qur'ānic revelation is, by and large, if not all, symbolic truth, not the literal truth, but that it must remain the literal truth for the masses.<sup>64</sup> The revelations contained in the religious scriptures are mostly figurative in nature and must, therefore, be in need of interpretation in order to elicit the higher, underlying, spiritual truth.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, in Ibn Sina's theory of knowledge, an attempt of elucidation of the perceptual knowledge and its different phases of development are visible. He also tries to show divine revelation is based on a rational foundation and, thereby, endeavours to reconcile the spirit of reason and revelation.

## ŠUFISM

Šufism, *Taṣawwuf* is the mystical philosophy of Islam; the main aim of Šūfis is to attain the nearness of Allah—to apprehend Divine Reality. Šūfis have got some important views on the epistemological issues. Before al-Ghazālī, we see some of the great Šūfis who, apart from their spiritual practices and scrupulously led life, have made some contribution to epistemology. Šufism – an appeal to a higher source knowledge which was first systematised by *Dhu'n-Nūn al-Miṣrī* (245 A.H./859 A.D.), and became more and more anti-scholastic in

63. Sharif, *op. cit.*, pp. 492-93.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 498; cf. Arberry, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 500.

contrast to dry intellectualism of the Ash'ariyas.<sup>66</sup> He took a very significant step in the development of Sūfism by distinguishing the mystic's knowledge of Allah (*ma'rifah*) from traditional and intellectual knowledge and by connecting the former with love (*ishq*). He says:

True knowledge of Allah, is not the knowledge that Allah is One, which is possessed by all believers; nor the knowledge of Him derived from proof and demonstration, which belongs to philosophers, rhetoricians, and theologians; but it is the knowledge of the attributes of Divine Unity, which belongs to the saints of Allah, those who behold Allah with hearts in such wise that He reveals unto them what He reveleth not unto any one else in the world.<sup>67</sup>

Al-Muhāsibī (d. 243 A.H./857 A.D.) is among the earliest ṣūfī writers who makes a distinction between the knowledge which can be acquired by study (*'ilm*) and intuitive understanding (*ma'rifah*) which is given, not acquired, by means of which man can learn to know himself and his Lord and the true worth of this world in comparison with the world to come.<sup>68</sup> Junaid of Baghdad (d. 298 A.H./910 A.D.) another prominent Ṣūfī has too, made a distinction between exoteric and esoteric knowledge. He expresses his indebtedness to 'Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib for his mystic knowledge; for 'Alī, according to him, possessed an abundance of both exoteric and esoteric knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Al-Hallaj (d. 309 A.H./922 A.D.), who was martyred for his extravagant utterances related to divine secretes, accepts reason as the source of knowledge with some reservations. He was not fully satisfied with the reasoned demonstration. Sure and certain knowledge, to him, comes from Allah through inspiration.<sup>70</sup>

66. Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, p. 46.

67. Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*, Quoted in R.A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*, Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, reprint, 1976, pp. 9-10.

68. Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, London: Luzac & Co. 1944, p. 124.

69. Sharif, *op. cit.*, 344.

70. Arberry, *op. cit.*, 29.

Another important ṣūfī writer is Abū Ṭālib al Makki (d. 386 A.H./996 A.D.), who made a significant contribution to Islamic epistemology. He distinguishes between outward knowledge (*al-'ilm az-Zāhir*) and inward knowledge (*al-'ilm al-bāḥin*): the former is concerned with this world (*al-Mulk*) and latter with the world to come (*al-Malakūt*), and the inner knowledge, he maintains, is superior to the outward as the invisible world to the visible.<sup>71</sup>

Al-Qushairī (d. 465 A.H./1072 A.D.) was one of the greatest ṣūfī writers who wrote on different aspects of Sūfism. He also, like some of his ṣūfī predecessors, made a distinction between 'gnosis' (*'irfān*) and 'knowledge' (*'ilm*). Gnosis is achieved by one who has knowledge of the real in all the various aspects and then carries out his dealings with everybody within the constant framework of reference to Allah, gets rid of his own base features and does not allow to penetrate even a single idea in his mind which attracts him to anything but Allah. He who has achieved all this is known as a gnostic (*'arif*) and his state is known as that of gnosis (*ma'rifah*).<sup>72</sup>

Another noted pre-Ghazalian ṣūfī is al-Hujwiri (d.c. 456/1063 A.D.) who like al-Qushairī highlights the basic distinction between gnosis and knowledge. Knowledge, to him, is that which in the last resort, when analyzed, never takes us beyond empty verbal form. Gnosis, on the other hand, is that awareness which, when analyzed, ends up in direct experience of concrete facts, processes and things. Knowledge, therefore, seldom influences one's real conduct, while gnosis can seldom remain without influencing it.<sup>73</sup>

Now, we have got a brief account of the epistemological position of the pre-Ghazalian ṣūfīs who made a significant contribution to Islamic epistemology. Thus, we have found a brief outline of the epistemological views of the four main schools of Muslim philosophy Mu'tazilah, Ash'ariah, Philosophers and ṣūfīs.

71. Abū-Ṭālib Al-Makki, *Qut al-Qulūb*, Cairo, A.H. 1351 Vol. 1, p. 197; Margaret Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

72. Sharif, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 331.

But our account of the pre-Ghazalian Muslim epistemology would remain incomplete without the inclusion of another school i.e., *Iḫwān aṣ-ṣafā*.

The group of the *Iḫwān aṣ-ṣafā* (originated about 373 A.H./983 A.D.) made a remarkable contribution to the different branches of Muslim Philosophy.

They had showed a great interest in epistemology. They accept the role of the five senses in the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>74</sup> But through our senses we acquire only the material changes immediately apprehended by us and occurring in space and time. They view that man acquires knowledge also by means of primary reason. But reason, if unaided by sound senses, cannot acquire knowledge. Moreover, concepts having no connection with senses, like those of Allah and the First Matter, cannot be acquired through this process. Akin to the two previous ways is the way of proof, the way of the trained dialecticians.

The object of the present study, as already been mentioned in the preface, is to make an in-depth assessment of al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. Much has been written on the life and works of al-Ghazālī (b. 450 A.H./1058 A.D.; d. 505 A.H./1111 A.D.). So in this book we shall not include his biography.

Apart from the introduction, this book would consist of five chapters. In the first chapter we shall give a general account of epistemology which may work as a paradigm to our present study. In this chapter, the requirements, the sources, the nature and the validity of knowledge in the light of modern epistemology will be dealt with. In the second chapter, we shall deal with al-Ghazālī's view of knowledge and its sources. We shall explain Ghazalian notion of the nature of knowledge in the third chapter. The fourth chapter will deal with al-Ghazālī's outlook on the validity of knowledge. In the fifth and last chapter, we shall make an attempt to examine and evaluate al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge as a whole.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

## Chapter – I

### Theory of Knowledge: A General Account

Before going to a general account of theory of knowledge, i.e., epistemology, it would be pertinent to give a brief account of what a philosopher means by knowledge and under which condition something can be considered as knowledge.

It has been commonly accepted, although Edmund Gettier differs, that knowledge requires three basic conditions.<sup>1</sup> Philosophers commonly call them; the truth condition, the belief condition and the justification condition.<sup>2</sup> Any standard analysis of a person S's knowing P would be in the form similar to the following analysis:

S knows P, if and only if

- (i) P is true
- (ii) S believes that P, and
- (iii) S is justified in believing P.<sup>3</sup>

Such an analysis treats conditions (i), (ii) and (iii) as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for S's knowing P. In the first case P must be true, otherwise no knowledge of P is possible. In the second case, P is believed to be true. There may be all sorts of true statements, but if one does not believe them, he can hardly claim that he knows them. In the middle ages very few people would say that the earth was round and they did not know that it was – not because the statement 'the earth is round' was not true but because they did not believe, it was. Philosophers then put forward the last point that the former two

1. Edmund Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' *Analysis* 23: 121-123. Reprinted in Roth and Galis, 1970. He considers that these three conditions are insufficient for knowing something. But he does not provide the substitute conditions for this. Our concern here is not to go in detail on this very issue.
2. Report K. Shope, *The Analysis of Knowing*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 3.
3. *Loc. cit.*

conditions, i.e., truth and belief conditions are not sufficient for knowing. The knower should be justified in believing that known object.<sup>4</sup>

Now, we may turn to the subject matter of epistemology which consists of the sources, nature and validity of knowledge.

### 1. The Sources of Knowledge

In connection with the sources of knowledge philosophers have different opinions. Some put stress on reason, while others of experience, i.e. sense-perception, and still others on intuition. Some other thinkers seek the synthesis of reason and sense-perception in the acquisition of knowledge. To some others, testimony or authority is the source of knowledge. Let us see how these have been presented by their defenders and what role they played in determination of different philosophical systems.

#### Reason

The English word 'reason' has got various senses and uses, related to one another in ways that often are not very simple. Here, we shall use 'reason' in its epistemological sense, i.e., as a source of knowledge. Here, reason stands in contrast to experience. In this context, the point that is primary is the role of reason in the origin of knowledge i.e., what reason can achieve, or to say in a crude way, what we can discover or establish by merely sitting and thinking.

The thinkers who highlight reasoning as the central factor in knowledge are known as rationalists. Rationalism is based on the view that we know what we have thought out, that the mind is capable to discover truth by itself, or that knowledge is obtained by comparing ideas with ideas.<sup>5</sup> The term 'rationalism' (from the Latin *ratio* 'reason') has been used to refer to a number of viewpoints and movements of ideas. By far, the most important of these is the philosophical outlook or programme which lays emphasis upon the power of *a priori* reason to grasp substantial

4. Paul Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York: The Macmillan Co. & the Free Press, 1967; Vol. IV, p. 346.

5. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, p. 41.

truths about the world and, correspondingly, considers natural science as a basically *a priori* effort.<sup>6</sup>

The rationalists in emphasizing man's power of thought and what the mind contributes to it, are likely to assert that the senses by themselves, cannot give us coherent and universally valid judgements. The highest kind of knowledge consists in the universally valid judgements that are consistent with one another. The sensations and experiences, we receive through the senses – sight, sound, touch, taste and smell – are just the materials of knowledge. These sensations have to be organized by the mind into a meaningful system before they become knowledge. The rationalists are of the opinion that knowledge is found in concepts, principles, and laws, not just in raw sensations.<sup>7</sup>

It is maintained that the most perfect form of knowing is the type which is found in mathematical demonstration. Such demonstration consists in starting with premises which are self evident, intuitively certain, or are said to be clear and distinct, and deducing the consequences of these axioms and truths.

By this method we can assume ourselves certainty in knowledge. The source of our first premises is the 'natural light' of reason and our developed knowledge would have the validity characteristic of strict logical deduction. Just as this is true of mathematical knowledge, similarly it can also be true in case of our knowledge of the world. Among the prominent representatives of modern rationalism, the names of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel may be mentioned.

#### Experience

The term 'experience', is generally understood as the acquaintance with some matter of practical concern, based on repeated past association or performance. An experienced doctor or soldier knows his trade, not by the book merely, but by long

6. Maurice Mandelbaum, Francis W. Gramlich, Alan Rose Anderson, ed. *Philosophic Problems: An Introductory Book of Readings*, New York: The Macmillan Company-1960, p. 114.

7. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, p. 41.

practice under a variety of circumstances. But in epistemology, the term 'experience' has been used in a little bit different way. Here, a group of thinkers is found who consider experience as the only authentic source of knowledge, and they are, accordingly, known as the empiricists. What we see, hear, touch, smell and taste – that is, our concrete experiences—set the domain of knowledge. Empiricism puts stress upon man's power of perception, or observation, or what the mind receives from the external world. Knowledge is obtained by forming ideas in accordance with the observed facts. Empiricism to state briefly, simply states that we know what we have found out from our senses.<sup>8</sup>

The word 'empiricism' is derived from the Greek word *emperia*, the Latin translation of which is *experientia*, from which in turn we have derived the word 'experience'.<sup>9</sup> There may be several versions of empiricism. The weakest form of it is the doctrine that the senses do provide us with knowledge in some sense of the word. The weak form of empiricism can be generalized into the thesis that all knowledge comes from experience. The extreme form of this thesis would be to claim that no source other than experience supplies knowledge at all.<sup>10</sup>

The prominent representatives of empiricism are: Epicurus in the ancient period, St. Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period, and the British empiricists, Locke, Barkeley and Hume in the modern period. The British empiricists claim experience as the only source of knowledge. But the techniques they adopt in order to establish their views, are not uniform.

### Intuition

The term 'intuition' (*intueri*, to look upon) symbolizes the conception that one among the sources of knowledge is the direct and immediate apprehension of truth.<sup>11</sup> It does not accept the

8. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, p. 39.

9. Paul Edwards, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, New York, 1967, pp. 499.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 499.

11. Mandelbaum, Gramlich & Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

notion that all wisdom is based on, whether directly or indirectly, upon intellectual processes and reasoned judgements. A possible source of knowledge is intuition, or the direct apprehension of knowledge. In the literature dealing with intuition, one comes across such expressions as 'immediate feeling of certainty', 'Imagination touched with conviction', a 'total response' to some 'total situation' and a 'direct insight into the truth'.

Different explanations are found regarding intuition. There is an element of intuition present in all knowledge. Henry Bergson, considers intuition as a higher kind of knowledge different in nature from that disclosed by the senses or intellect.<sup>12</sup> Intuition, according to mystics, may enable us to gain a vision of reality, to receive the inspirations from God, or to experience a union with God.<sup>13</sup> In mysticism, it is claimed that truth can be attained by supra-rational and supra-sensuous faculty of intuition. Followers of all the great religions claim that their leaders gained a unique insight into religious and moral truths through intuition.

### Synthesis of Reason and Sense-Experience

In the history of Western Philosophy, perhaps Kant is the first who attempts to give a synthetic explanation of knowledge. He tries to show that knowledge is the joint product of both reason and sense-experience. Kant maintains that knowledge cannot consist exclusively in the receiving of sense-impressions as pleaded by Hume. A judgement that merely reports the sense impressions which we receive in our day to day life can never be universally valid and necessarily true.

Kant maintains that all knowledge begins with experience but it does not raise, necessarily, out of it. He is of the opinion that there are two *a priori* forms of sensibility – space and time. All objects of perception are necessarily located in space-time framework. Kant also holds that all empirical knowledge is the

12. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 291.

13. Jame A. Gould, ed. *Classic Philosophical Questions*, Fourth edition, Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co. 1982, p. 239.

product of human understanding which organizes the contents of sense-experience and, also, meaningfully categorizes them. These principles are termed by Kant as the categories of understanding. They are not product of experience but the ground of all empirical knowledge. He also points out that the employment of *a priori* and pure categories of understanding independent of the data supplied by the senses is illegitimate. Thus, Kant has made an attempt to synthesize the role of reason and sense-experience in the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

### Authority and Testimony

Authoritarianism is an epistemological doctrine according to which knowledge is guaranteed or validated by an authority. In authoritarianism, the scope of critical and independent inquiry ceases regardless of its form. Authority or testimony is accepted on blind faith and, it is ignored whether its claim does or does not harmonize with experience.

As a classic illustration of authoritarianism we may cite the Scholastic thinkers of the Middle ages who dared not to deviate from the teaching of the Church. In Indian Philosophy, the place of authority or testimony as the source of knowledge is well-founded. Sankara accepts *Agama* or scriptural testimony as an independent source of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Madhava, another noted thinker of India, also accepts testimony as the source of knowledge. He accepts the authority of the Vedas as a whole.<sup>16</sup> In Muslim philosophy, the authority of the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet(s) has a great importance as the source of knowledge, particularly religious knowledge. In every religion, the respective scripture is accepted as the authority and the informations it contains have been accepted without any serious critical judgement.

14. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Tr. into Eng. by F. Max. Muller, Sec. ed. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922, pp. 105-6.

15. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Blackie Son Publishers, 1983, p. 494.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 739.

## 2. The Nature of Knowledge

The second important question discussed in epistemology pertains to the nature of knowledge. The chief philosophical question that crops up in such an issue is that of appearance versus reality; whether or not the object apprehended can retain its existence and character apart from its relation to the apprehending subject. Dealing with this problem, philosophers have different views, which are as follow:

### The Commonsense View

An ordinary man who has not seriously thought about the problem of perception and the physical world, may be termed as a 'realist' in the broad sense of the term. This view is usually held as the commonsense view of the world. According to this, the distinctions between thoughts and things, past and present, and absent, knower and object known are comparatively fixed and are common to all spectators. Things we come across in our day-to-day life, exist in their own right quite independently of our perceiving and thinking about them.<sup>17</sup> This doctrine is called 'naive realism'. We may be aware of the things of the world when we come in contact with them through the senses.

### Subjectivism

The other name of subjectivism is 'epistemological idealism'. According to which, the objects or the qualities of the world which are perceived by the senses, do not exist independently of a consciousness of them. Historically, this position is represented best by the philosopher, George Berkeley. His most famous statement is: 'To be is to be perceived'. He begins with the philosophy of John Locke who divides the qualities of material

17. Wm. Pepperell Montague, *The Ways of Knowing*, London: George Allan & Unwin Ltd., 1925, p. 240.

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substance into primary qualities – form, extension, solidity, motion, number and so on – and the secondary qualities – colour, sound, taste, odour and so on. The primary qualities of an object are those that exist independently of any perception. But the secondary qualities are not really the qualities of the object of the external world; they vary from person to person, and are, therefore, in the mind.<sup>18</sup> Berkeley, however, claims that the same argument can also be applied to the primary and secondary qualities as 'ideas' and concluded that material object is simply a collection of ideas.<sup>19</sup>

**Objectivism**

The objectivists or the epistemological realists reject the view of Berkeley, that is 'to exist is to be a mind or an idea in some mind'. They uphold the existence of an external world independent of the mind. The naive realists, as we have already come across, contend that we perceive the physical object itself. In Locke's version of realism, which is termed as 'copy theory' or 'representative realism', it is maintained that the primary qualities are in the outer world, but the secondary qualities are in the mind. The mind knows the copies of images of the external things. The critical realists of the twentieth century would claim that what we perceive is not an object but what is called 'sense-data'.<sup>20</sup> To them, our knowledge of the physical object is not direct knowledge. It is obtained through acquaintance with the sense-data that make up the appearance of the physical object.<sup>21</sup>

18. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, p. 58.

19. Harold H. Titus & Naylor H. Hepp, *The Range of Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, Second ed. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970, p. 29 (taken from George Berkeley's, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*).

20. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 25.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

**Intermediary Positions**

Some writers point out that between subjectivism and objectivism, there is a position known as 'phenomenalism' or 'epistemological dualism'. The best representative of phenomenalism is Kant, according to whom phenomena can only be known; we cannot know the ultimate reality. Kant divides the world into three parts, as an attempt to answer the question what we can know. These three are: an inner world of subjective states (i.e. images, sensations and the like), which is not the realm of knowledge; the world of ultimate reality (noumenon or thing-in-itself), which is unknown and unknowable by sense-perception; and the world of nature or of experience, the phenomenal realm which is the realm of human knowledge. The mind is active, and it forms a system of knowledge out of all the materials brought in by the senses. This notion of Kant has been termed differently. According to some, it is 'phenomenalistic realism'; to some others, 'Kantian idealism', and another group terms it just as 'phenomenalism'.<sup>22</sup>

The contemporary school of critical realism is also called epistemological dualism; for this school holds that external objects are known through the mediation of sense-data, which is not identical with the physical object. Opposed to this school is neo-realism that is called 'epistemological monism' as it regards sense-data identical with the object.

**3. The Validity of Knowledge**

The validity of knowledge is one of the three main problems of epistemology. A question may arise: whether the human mind is capable of acquiring genuine knowledge; in other words, knowledge which is valid, why some beliefs are considered to be true and others are false. The answer to these questions had been sought by the Greek philosophers, such as, Socrates, Plato and others. Men are still seeking the answer. Through out the ages, opinions and beliefs have tended to change – not only the

22. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, p. 59.

common everyday belief but, also, the beliefs held in the field of science and philosophy. A great diversity of beliefs has been found among the philosophers of the past and of the present. In the field of epistemology, in order to determine the validity and the invalidity (i.e. truth and falsity) of knowledge, philosophers have put forward three different theories, e.g. 'the correspondence theory of truth' 'the coherence theory of truth', and 'the pragmatic theory of truth'.<sup>23</sup>

### The Correspondence Theory

The correspondence theory is the most widely accepted theory of truth to the realists. It claims that truth is 'fidelity to objective reality'. A statement is true if it describes the fact, or agrees with the actual situation.<sup>24</sup> Truth is an agreement between the fact and the statement of the fact; or between the judgement and the environmental situation of which the judgement claims to be a report. Things by themselves are neither true nor false. They just are or are not. Truth has to do with the assertions or the claims that we make about things.

The exponents of the correspondence theory of truth hold that the presence or absence of belief has no direct bearing on the issue of truth and falsehood; because truth and falsehood depend on the condition or set of conditions which has been affirmed or denied. A judgement is true if it does correspond with the fact, and, false, if it fails to correspond to it.

### The Coherence Theory

The coherence theory of the test of truth places its trust in the consistency or harmony of all our judgements; because, to this, we cannot compare our ideas and judgements with the world as it is. The defenders of the 'coherence theory of truth' are, generally, the idealists, although it is not only confined to that school of thought. According to this theory, a judgement can be held to be

23. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

24. A.D. Woozley, *Theory of Knowledge*, Seventh Impression, London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966, p. 126.

true if it is consistent with the other judgements that have already been accepted or known to be true. True judgements are logically coherent with other relevant judgements. The coherence theory of truth in its simplest form, demands an inner or formal consistency in the system under consideration, quite apart from any interpretation of the universe as a whole.<sup>25</sup>

The idealistic principle of consistency considers truth as a reciprocally consistent system of propositions, each of which gets its truth from the whole system.

The idealists add that it is the consistency of our human beliefs with the whole which makes them true. Thus, purely formal consistency is abandoned and coherence with reality is made the essence of truth. It is this aspect which justifies calling this a 'metaphysical form of the coherence theory of truth'.<sup>26</sup>

### The Pragmatic Theory – The Test of Utility

There is another group of philosophers who do not accept both correspondence theory and coherence theory as the successful theories as regard to the test of truth or validity of knowledge. To them, truth itself cannot correspond to reality since we know our experience only. On the other hand, the coherence theory is formal. The exponents of this theory do not have any concern about substance and essences. In their interpretation of the flux of experience, the pragmatists are out-and-out empiricists. For them, the test of truth is utility, workability or satisfactory consequences.<sup>27</sup>

The supporters of this approach to truth do not accept anything as static or absolute truth. The main exponents of this approach are John Dewey and William James. In their writings they have tried to explain the nature of truth. To them, an idea or a theory or a hypothesis is true if it works out in practice, or if it leads to satisfactory result.

25. Cf. Titus & Hepp, *Range of Philosophy*, p. 38.

26. Daniel S. Robinson, *An Introduction to Living Philosophy*, New York: Thomas, Y. Crowell Company, 1932, pp. 104-105.

27. William James, *Pragmatism*, New York and London, 1907, pp. 216-217.

### The Problem of Error

The problem of the validity of knowledge gives rise to the possibility of error. The problem of error also forms an important part of epistemology. In Greek philosophy Parmenides seems to have paid some attention to this problem. Plato dealt with this problem in details.<sup>28</sup> In contemporary philosophy, this problem has been discussed by different philosophers, particularly by neo-realists and critical realists.

A detailed account of the neo-realistic theory of error is found in the writings of W.P. Montague and E.B. Holt. The position they hold is not uniform. Holt suggests that error of any kind does not prove the existence of any subjective inference nor even much of physiological distortion. Contradictory facts and laws exist in the objective world that result in error.<sup>29</sup> In case two contradictory things are perceived, though both are not real, both of them are objective. To be objective and to be real are not same thing. Similarly, to be false does not mean to be subjective.<sup>30</sup> Elucidating various kinds of error Holt concludes that error is not subjective.

Montague differs with the view of Holt in connection with his theory of consciousness and that of error. Holt's view, "contradictions are objective and related after the manner of opposing forces" is rejected by Montague. He maintains that the unreal object or content of an error *subsists* extramentally but it does not contribute any casual manner to its being apprehended. It can be known but it itself does not have the status to be known.<sup>31</sup> The attempt is made by Montague to explain error realistically without being influenced by any subjective or ideal

28. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 46.

29. D.M. Datta, *The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy*, Third edition, Calcutta: The University of Calcutta, 1970, p. 330; Cf. John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, England: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 263.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 331.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

interference. So, according to Montague. 'The source of error is due to the plurality of causes and counteraction of effects'.<sup>32</sup>

Critical realists' treatment of the problem of error is different from that of neo-realists'. According to the former group, two reasons are mainly responsible for the neo-realists' failure to explain error; their monistic identification of content with object, and their attempt to deny the subjective. The monistic stand is objected on the ground that it is unable to explain how a memory image of a past object can be considered to be identical with the present one. Knowledge cannot be merely explained in terms of physical causation or physiological reproduction. The denial of subjective element is unacceptable. Knowledge contains the factor of belief which is irreducible to objective terms.<sup>33</sup>

When we claim to know something, we assign a certain 'essence' – character or group of characters – to some reality existing independently of the knowledge process. Truth being an identity of this essence with the actual character of the reality referred to, error would lack such an agreement, and ascribe such essence mistakenly to a wrong character instead of a right one.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, epistemology is that branch of philosophy which looks into the problems concerning the sources, the nature and the validity of knowledge. Various epistemological theories have been put forward by the different philosophers from time to time as just outlined above. Since our main concern is to study al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge we may now turn our attention to analyze his views on the above mentioned main epistemological problems, namely, the sources, the nature and the validity of knowledge.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 334, quoted from *The New Realism* (ed. 1922) p. 298.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

## Chapter – II

### The Ghazalian Account of Knowledge and its Sources

In most of his writings al-Ghazālī highlights the importance of knowledge. He tries to show that knowledge is essential for both worldly as well as religious affairs. He very often quotes the verses of the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet(s) in order to show the significance of knowledge. Before going to his theory of knowledge it would, perhaps, be proper to see what al-Ghazālī does mean by knowledge itself. Let us quote a passage from his work in this connection:

“To begin with, what I am looking for is knowledge of what things really are, so I must undoubtedly try to find what knowledge really is. It was plain to me that sure and certain knowledge is that knowledge in which the object is disclosed in such a fashion that no doubt remains along with it, that no possibility of error or illusion accompanies it, and that the mind cannot even entertain such a supposition. Certain knowledge must also be infallible; and this infallibility or security from error is such that no attempt to show the falsity of knowledge can occasion doubt or denial...”<sup>1</sup>

In the previous Chapter we have seen that knowledge, as it is generally held, requires the fulfilment of the three basic conditions. A person's claim to know something can only then be considered knowledge when (1) what is known is to be true; (2) the knower must believe what he has known; and (3) the knower is justified in believing what he has known. Now, if we analyze the above quotation of al-Ghazālī we see that it has a striking similarity with the modern approach to knowledge which we have already discussed.

We may notice a resemblance between al-Ghazālī's statement, “sure and certain knowledge is that knowledge in

which the object is disclosed in such a fashion that no doubt remains along with it,” and the first requirement of knowledge in modern epistemology that “what is known is to be true”. Here, al-Ghazālī tries to show that what is known is to be disclosed clearly, it should be free from any doubt and it would not be accompanied by any error. Now, if we compare ‘what is known is to be true’ with the above analysis of al-Ghazālī's statement, the Ghazālīan position seems to be more stronger and rigid. Secondly, “that mind cannot even entertain such a supposition” means that the knower should not have any doubt of what he has known. This is also similar to the statement that “the knower believes that what he has known”. Thirdly, al-Ghazālī's notion that “certain knowledge must also be infallible, and this infallibility or security from error is such that no attempt to show the falsity of knowledge can occasion doubt or denial”, is similar, to a large extent, to the justification condition of knowledge of modern epistemology.

From the above discussion it seems that there are similarities between the Ghazalian conditions of knowledge and the conditions of knowledge prescribed by modern epistemology—although al-Ghazālī's language is to some extent different. It may, perhaps, not be a very strong claim that al-Ghazālī's conditions are comparatively more accurate and precise.

Al-Ghazālī agrees with Abū Tālib al-Makkī's (d. 996 A.D.) classification of knowledge into outward (*al-‘ilm-az-zahīr*) and inward (*al-‘ilm-al-bātin*) ones. The former is concerned with the external world (*al-‘ālam-al-mulk*) and the latter with the invisible world (*al-‘ālam-al-malakūt*). By ‘*mulk*’ al-Ghazālī means the visible world perceived by the senses and by ‘*malakūt*’ he means the invisible world which is perceived by the light of insight. The heart, the instrument of inner knowledge, belongs to the ‘world of *malakūt*’; and the members, the instruments of outward knowledge and their actions belong to the ‘world of *mulk*’<sup>2</sup>.

1. W. Montgomery Watt, *Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, Eng. tr. of al-Ghazālī's *al-Munquidh min aḍ-Ḍalāl*, and *Bidayat-al-Hidāya*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1953, pp. 21-22.

2. Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' Ulūm id-Dīn*, Cairo: 1340 A.H. Vols. I, p. 107; II, p. 4; p. 216; *Fatihat al-'Ulūm*, Cairo, 1322 A.H. p. 40; *Imla*, Cairo: 1322 A.H. p. 216; *Mishkat al-Anwar*, Cairo: 1343 A.H. p. 122; Cf. Abu Talib Al-Makkī, *Qūṭ al-Qulūb*, Cairo, 1351 A.H. Vols. I, p. 200; II, p. 32, III, p. 106.

Al-Ghazālī is of the opinion that knowledge can also be divided into two parts *al-'ilm al-mu'āmalah* or the science of conduct and *al-'ilm al-mukāshafah* of the intuitive knowledge of Allah. *al-'ilm al-mu'āmalah* is simply the means of attaining the higher knowledge, i.e., *al-'ilm al-mukāshafah*. *al-'ilm al-mu'āmalah* includes both theory and practice.<sup>3</sup>

We may, now turn to al-Ghazālī's view of the different sources of knowledge, and see how far he recognizes their importance in the act of cognition.

### Sense-Experience

Let us see first what status al-Ghazālī has given to sense-experience in the acquisition of knowledge. Al-Ghazālī holds that man's information about the world is by means of perception, and every perception of the perceptibles is created so that thereby man may have some acquaintance with a world (or sphere) from among existents.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ghazālī has named the material world as *al-'ālam al-mahsūsāt* and the spiritual world as *al-'ālam al-malakūt*. In comparison to the spiritual world the material world is very brief, small and limited.<sup>5</sup> According to him, human soul has two doors for acquiring knowledge. One is open towards the spiritual world which is 'the world of Angels and the Guarded Tablet' (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*); and the other door is open towards the five senses and it is connected with the material world.<sup>6</sup> The knowledge of the learned and the scientist comes out of that gate of the souls which remains open towards the material world.<sup>7</sup> Here, al-Ghazālī wants to say that the informations of the scientists are gathered through the senses, and the learned men, also, make themselves enlightened with the help of sense-experience.

3. *Ihya*, Vol. I, pp. 18-19.

4. *Faith and Practice*, p. 63.

5. Al-Ghazālī, *Kimīyā-ye-Sa'ādat* (Bengali translation by Nurur Rahman) Dhaka: Imdadia Library, 1976, p. 52.

6. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'Ulum id-Dīn*, English translation by Fazlur Karim, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1982, Vol. 3, p. 25.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Al-Ghazālī has based his theory of knowledge on '*aql*' (intellect). The word '*aql*', according to him, can be used interchangeably in four distinct senses. Experience i.e., sense-perception, as Al-Ghazālī considers it, is one of the aspects of the human intellect ('*aql*'). He maintains that intellect has to perform four distinct but interchangeable functions<sup>8</sup> as mentioned below. First, it is the quality which distinguishes man from other animals, and prepares him to understand and grasp theoretical science (*nazariyyah*), and master the abstract (*fikriyyah*) disciplines. Ghazālī considers it as a light cast into the heart preparing it thereby to grasp things and understand them.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, the word '*aql*' is applied to that knowledge which makes its appearance even in the infant who discerns the possibility of possible things (*ja'izat*) and the impossibility of impossible things (*mustahilāt*), such as the knowledge that 'two is greater than one' and that 'one individual cannot be in two different places at the same time'.<sup>10</sup> In the third place, the word '*aql*' has been applied to that knowledge which is acquired through experience in the course of events. Thus, he who has been taught by experience and schooled by time is called intelligent ('*aqil*').<sup>11</sup> In the fourth place, the word '*aql*' is used when the power of instinct develops to such an extent that its owner will be able to tell what the end will be. This is also the distinctive power of human being which makes him different from other animals.<sup>12</sup> Al-Ghazālī has grouped the four phases of intellect ('*aql*') into two: (1) native (*bi-al-tab'*) and (2) acquired (*bi-al-iktisāb*).<sup>13</sup> We have already seen that al-Ghazālī has considered sense-experience as one aspect of the '*aql*' and, also, shown its link with the knowledge of the material world. Human soul acquires knowledge of the activities of the different things, their characters, and also their nature through the senses.<sup>14</sup>

8. Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, Eng. tr. of the *Kitab al-'Ilm* of al-Ghazālī's *Ihya*, Lahore: Sh. Mohd. Ashraf, 1962, p. 226.

9. *Loc-Cit.*

10. *Ibid.*, 227.

11. *Loc. cit.*

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 277-28.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

14. *Kimīyā-ye Sa'ādat*, Beng. tr. Vol. I, pp. 51-52.

In other words experience or sense-perception is nothing but the acquired intellect which provides knowledge of the material world.

### Reason

In our discussion on sense-experience we have mentioned that the word '*aql*' has distinct meanings in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. Although the different meanings are interlinked, their scope and methods are different in the acquisition of knowledge. In the first sense, it means the distinctive quality of human being which makes him different from other animals.<sup>15</sup> In the second sense, the word '*aql*' is applied to that knowledge which makes its appearance even in the infant who discerns the possibility and the impossibility of things.<sup>16</sup> It is axiomatic and is derived from the application and extent of '*aql*'.<sup>17</sup> Here, al-Ghazālī's use of the term '*aql*' seems to have similarity with the rationalists' use of the term 'reason' as source of knowledge.

The term '*aql*' as we have already seen, has distinct meanings in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. He has grouped them into two e.g. (1) native and (2) acquired. Reason falls in the former group. It is inborn and innate.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes al-Ghazālī considers it as natural knowledge. This preliminary knowledge is imprinted in a boy's mind in his earliest year. He does not know wherefrom this knowledge comes.<sup>19</sup>

According to al-Ghazālī's theoretical reason (*al-'aql an-nazārī*) is concerned with the understanding of the phenomenal and the spiritual realities. It apprehends, generalizes and forms concepts. It goes from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general, from diversity to unity.<sup>20</sup> Al-Ghazālī

15. *Kitāb al-'Ilm of Iḥyā* (Eng. tr.) pp. 226-27.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

17. *Loc. cit.*

18. *Cf. Ibid.*, p. 227-28.

19. Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā*, Eng. tr. Vol. 3, p. 18.

20. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzālī*, Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University Press, 1962, p. 66.

considers reason as a strong power in human beings. He terms it as light (*nūr*). Among many powers in a human being reason is the strongest. By reason, man can acquire such types of knowledge which cannot be acquired through the senses.<sup>21</sup> Thus, al-Ghazālī wants to show that as the source of knowledge reason in some cases, has the higher status in comparison to sense-perception. In many cases sense-perception cannot provide any knowledge, while reason is capable to provide such knowledge.

### Synthesis of Reason and Sense-Perception

Synthesis of reason and sense-perception plays a vital role in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. Although he has accepted, as we have already seen, independent roles of sense-perception and reason in the process of cognition, he emphasizes their synthesis also. He says that knowledge is implanted in the souls at their beginning (i.e. when first created), with potentiality, like the seed in the earth and the pearl in the depths of the sea, or in the heart of mine; and study is just needed to bring forth that thing from potentiality to actuality.<sup>22</sup> Al-Ghazālī wants to say that what potentially exists in human soul is not sufficient for knowledge; for bringing this potentiality into actuality the study of nature through sense-perception is required. He says that when the bodily powers prevail over the soul the learner needs more study, and must spend more time on it, and he must be ready to take trouble and much exhaustion in the search for fruit.<sup>23</sup>

But side by side he puts stress on the reflection of the receptive soul which gives proper shape to the informations gathered by the senses. When the light of reason prevails over the sensible qualities, the receptive soul through a single hour's reflection gains that much what the unreceptive soul can not even gain by a whole year of study.<sup>24</sup> Study needs reflection also; for,

21. *Kimiyye sa'adat* - Beng. tr. Vol. 4, p. 432.

22. al-Ghazālī, *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, translated into English by Margaret Smith, published in *the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, for 1938, p. 361.

23. *Loc. cit.*

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 361-62.

man can neither learn all particulars and universals, nor all subjects of knowledge. But he learns something and, through reflection, infers some other things from what he has already learnt.<sup>25</sup>

Al-Ghazālī uses the word *tafakkur* and by this he means 'to seek knowledge'.<sup>26</sup> He observes that knowledge always could not be received by the senses. In fact, in most cases, we stand in need of the help of inference and reasoning to cognize something.<sup>27</sup> When cognitions are arranged in a special way, a new cognition is the result. This new cognition joins with one of the earlier cognitions and gives rise to a still new cognition. Thus, the number of cognitions goes on increasing and knowledge is vastly increased and *tafakkur* makes a tremendous advance.<sup>28</sup> Al-Ghazālī says that sometimes, a man due to his inability of synthesizing different cognitions, fails to receive new knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Ghazālī is of opinion that certain things are deduced from the inner consciousness which ultimately work as the foundation of sciences.<sup>30</sup> Universal principles of sciences and their axioms are not discovered or deduced from mere collections of data but inference and comparison are to be applied on them.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it is found that in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge the synthesis of sense-perception and reason has got the recognition.

### Authority

Another significant source of knowledge in al-Ghazālī's epistemology is 'authority'. By this he means 'the authority of the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet(s)'. He accepts the information found in them without a serious rational inquiry.<sup>32</sup> He

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 361-62.

26. Al-Ghazālī's *Kimīyā*, Beng. tr. Vol. 4, p. 304.

27. *Loc. cit.*

28. *Ihyā*, Vol. 4, pp. 368-364.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

30. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. Tr. p. 362.

31. *Loc. cit.*

32. *Faith and Practice*, p. 83.

suggests that the authority of the Qu'rān, and the Traditions of the Prophet(s) has to be accepted without insisting on testing them by first-hand experience. Let us, quote a passage from al-Ghazālī in which he defends his contention with the help of some illustrations:

Suppose we imagine a man, mature and capable of reasoning, who has never before experienced illness, and then falls ill, whose father is a doctor, compassionate and skilled in medicine, whose medical skill has always been known to his son. If his father makes up a prescription and says to him: 'This will help you in your sickness and will heal you of your affliction,' what will be his response? Even though the medicine is bitter and abominable in taste, will he accept it, or will he reject it, saying: 'I understand that this medicine can ensure a cure, but I have not myself tested it by experience'? Would you not reckon him a fool if he did so? So also teaching which comes down on the authority of the Prophet and his successors is to be accepted even though its validity may not have been tested by the experience of those who receive it. And those reject it for a similar reason are but fools who deprive themselves of guidance and help.<sup>33</sup>

In order to defend the authority of the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet(s) al-Ghazālī holds that those who find contradictions and incoherence in them are themselves lacking in the required insight.<sup>34</sup> If anyone understands the privileges of a Prophet, and devotes much time to the study of the Qur'ān and the Traditions, he will arrive at necessary knowledge of the fact that Muhammad (May Allah bless and preserve him) is in the highest grade of the Prophethood.<sup>35</sup> And he would be convinced that what the Prophet(s) said about the different aspects of life is true.<sup>36</sup>

33. Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min ad-Dalāl*, Cairo, A.H. 1304, p. 33; Eng. tr. taken from Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī The Mystic*, pp. 80-81.

34. Eng. tr. of *Kitāb al-'Ilm of Ihyā*, p. 231.

35. *Faith and Practice*, p. 67.

36. *Loc. cit.*

Al-Ghazālī considers a Prophet to be physician of the diseases of hearts. One should trust the Prophetic revelation, as a blindman trust his guide, and an anxious patient depends on his sympathetic physician.<sup>37</sup> He further contends that in the process of reaching necessary knowledge one has to believe in the prophethood of the Prophet(s) and, also, to reflect on the Qur'an, and read the Traditions.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, we see that al-Ghazālī accepts the authority of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions without any hesitation. According to him, to believe in their teachings, and subsequently to follow them is the surest and the most secure way of success. Therefore, authority of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet(s) occupies an important status as the sources of knowledge in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge.

### Revelation and Intuition

#### 1. Al-Ghazālī's Division of The Worlds According to Different Levels of Knowledge

Al-Ghazālī forwards the concept of the three worlds, viz., *al-'ālam al-mulk* or *Shahāda* (material or phenomenal world), *al-'ālam al-malakūt* (spiritual, invisible world) and *al-'ālam al-jabarūt* (world of mind, reason, will and power).<sup>39</sup> From the view of their cognition each of the three worlds is distinct from others:

- (1) The objects of the terrestrial or phenomenal world can be perceived with the physical senses.
- (2) The spiritual or celestial world lies beyond the reach of the senses it is necessary to develop the spiritual faculty for gaining knowledge of this world, and
- (3) The intermediate world, the world of mind (*jabarūt*), serves as a link between the above mentioned two worlds.<sup>40</sup> Al-Ghazālī says that there are two kinds of the

37. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

39. *Ihya*, Vol. 3, pp. 23-27.

40. Umaruddin, *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 78-79; Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, London: Luzac & Co. 1944, p. 208.

eye—external and internal. The former belongs to one world, the World of sense, and the latter belongs to the world of the realm celestial; while the former world is disclosed through the senses the latter is revealed through revelation and intuition.<sup>41</sup>

The world of sense-perception attracts a novice with all its temptations. At this stage one has to endeavour to purify himself from the defilement which the material attachments cause. Between this base world and the divine world, there lies another world, that of *jabarūt*, which al-Ghazālī compares with a ship moving on the water; away from the land; neither it is moving unceasingly nor it is completely at a standstill. He who walks on the land is like one passing through the world of *mulk* and *shahāda*, but when he is strong enough to sail on a ship, he has passed into the 'world of *jabarut*' and when he reaches the stage of being able to walk upon the water, needing no ship, then he walks in the world of *malakūt* without the fear of being sunk.<sup>42</sup> The world of *jabarūt*, therefore, is an intermediate station on the way of his journey; he has left the land behind and is free from the sensual fetters and self-centred life, but he has not yet attained to a life altogether dominated by the spirit. His inner eye is open and he sees the goal clearly and hastens towards it, but is not yet there. At this stage, al-Ghazālī maintains, one is in the midst of good and evil. One who wipes out all the traces of evil, removes darkness from his hearts, his vision may still remain "somewhat dim" like a mirror which is blurred as a result of moisture caused by breathing upon it.<sup>43</sup> If a traveller does not stop here; he repents his sin, waits for Divine grace, and sacrifices his will for the will of Allah, only then Divine knowledge springs from his soul. Al-Ghazālī adds that this attainment does not depend on the human effort alone rather depends ultimately on the Divine Will.<sup>44</sup> It is now clear from the above that al-Ghazālī's three-fold division of

41. Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, Eng. tr. by W.H.T. Gairdner, Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1952, pp. 93-94.

42. *Ihyā* 4, p. 206, p. 216.

43. Cf. *Ihyā*, Book 3, p. 11.

44. Al-Ghazālī, *Ar-Rawdat at-Tālibin*, Cairo: A.H. 1344, p. 134.

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the worlds is related to his epistemological view. These three worlds represent three distinct stages of cognition that differ from each other according to the source and nature of knowledge.

Al-Ghazālī distinguishes between the two faculties of soul. One is leading to the knowledge of the world of angels and the Guarded Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*) and the other is leading to the world of senses.<sup>45</sup> About the knowledge of the spiritual world, al-Ghazālī says, it is something different from what the scientists and the learned men receive. The informations of the scientists and the learned men come through the five senses whereas the knowledge of the spiritual world can only be acquired by the prophets and the friends of Allah through revelation and intuition respectively.<sup>46</sup> Al-Ghazālī although accepts sense-perception as a source of knowledge, he regards spiritual knowledge superior to perceptual knowledge. We may quote the following passage from al-Ghazālī illustrating the purity and high status of spiritual knowledge:

... A well has been dug underneath the ground. There are two ways of pouring water in it, one way is 'through pipes or canals', and another way is to dig the well very deep, so that water may gush forth from its bottom. The second mode is better as water obtained in this way is more pure and lasting. Similarly, soul is like a well, knowledge is like water, and the five senses are like pipes or canals. Knowledge like water comes to the soul through the help of five organs like pipes or canals. If you wish to get pure knowledge, you shall have to shut up the five senses as you shut up the pipes or canals to get pure water into the well and dig it very deep so that pure water may gush forth from the bottom. The filth in the bottom must be cleared to allow pure water to gush forth from the bottom. So also, in order to get pure and unadulterated knowledge you shall have to shut knowledge gained by the five senses...<sup>47</sup>

45. *Iḥyā*, (Eng. tr.) 3, p. 25

46. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

47. *Iḥyā*, Eng. tr. Vol. III, p. 24.

## 1. The Difference and Similarity Between Revelation and Intuition

Al-Ghazālī, as we have already seen, talks about various kinds of knowledge acquired through sense-perception, reason, the synthesis of reason and sense-perception, and authority. These are acquired through effort. He adds there are two other kinds of knowledge that are not acquired through effort,<sup>48</sup> and these two kinds of knowledge belong to a Prophet (*nabī*) and a saint (*walī*).

Al-Ghazālī shows the difference between the 'prophetic knowledge' and 'knowledge of saints' and maintains that 'prophetic knowledge (*waḥy*) comes through an angel who reveals it to the soul of a Prophet.<sup>49</sup> In case of spiritual knowledge a prophet possesses the highest rank. All secrets are disclosed to him without his efforts.<sup>50</sup> Al-Ghazālī is of the opinion that esoteric knowledge, derived from revelation is higher and more certain than the scientific knowledge which is acquired through intellectual process. Revealed knowledge is the privilege of prophets.<sup>51</sup> He further says Allah has kept the door of revelation closed since the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (s) who is the apostle of Allah and the last of the prophets. His knowledge is more perfect, nobler and greater only because it is the result of Divine teachings and he never busied himself with human learning and teaching.<sup>52</sup> Al-Ghazālī seeks support for his contention from the Qur'ān where Allah says: "One Mighty Power taught him".<sup>53</sup>

Al-Ghazālī explains in detail the origin and the process of revelation. It is better to quote him at some length to get an exact idea of his notion of *waḥy*.

Divine revelation (*waḥy*) means the knowledge acquired when the soul has perfected itself and the defilement of

48. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

49. *Loc. cit.*

50. *Ibid.*, p. 8; Cf. *Ar-Risālat al-Ladunniyya*, Eng. tr. p. 363.

51. *Ar-Risālat al-Ladunniyya*, Eng. tr. p. 364.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 364-38.

53. Al-Qur'an, 53:5.

human nature passes away from it along with all the filthiness of greed and desire, and it is detached from the lusts of this world: its links with transient desires are severed and it turns towards its Creator and Master and takes hold upon the bounty of its Author and relies upon His grace and the outpouring of His light. Then Allah, the Most High, by His most excellent favour, welcomes that soul with full acceptance and looks upon in with (His) Divine regard, and He takes from it a tablet, and from Universal soul (*an-Nafsal-Kullī*) a pen which inscribes upon it all His knowledge. Then Universal Mind (*al-'Aql al-Kullī*) becomes the teacher and the sanctified soul the taught, and all knowledge is acquired by that soul and all images are impressed upon it without study and reflection.<sup>54</sup>

Al-Ghazālī says knowledge of a prophet sometimes lies even beyond the reach of the angels. He refers to the Qur'anic story of Adam and the angels. The whole lives of the angels are dedicated to the service of Allah and, by different means, acquired much knowledge, and thereby they became most learned of the creatures; and had the notion of having most understanding power among the created things.<sup>55</sup> Adam, on the other hand, was not learned because he had not studied and did not have the chance to approach to any teacher. Al-Ghazālī again refers to the Qur'anic story where Allah discloses His plan of the creation of vicegerent (*Khalifah*) i.e. man on earth in presence of the angels. The angels were found having a bit of boasting attitude as they reply "We do celebrate thy praises and glorify thy holy (name)."<sup>56</sup> Then Adam, as al-Ghazālī explains the story, returned to his Creator's door and having detached his heart from all created things, came to seek help from his Lord and He taught him the names (of all things). And Allah placed Adam in front of the angels and asked them to declare unto Him the names, and their

54. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p.363.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

56. *Al-Qur'ān*, 2:30

(angels) state was diminished in Adam's sight and their pride was broken and they were submerged in the sea of impotence. They said to Allah : "We have no knowledge but what Thou has taught us",<sup>57</sup> and Allah said:

"O Adam, tell them their names".<sup>58</sup> Then Adam informed them concerning the hidden things and the mysteries of the Divine command (*al-Amr*).<sup>59</sup> Citing this Qur'ānic story, al-Ghazālī wants to show that the rank of prophets is not only higher than that of the learned men, the scientists and the saints, but also, that of the angels. The prophets are acquainted with so many secret things of the heaven and earth which are not disclosed to the angels.

The second type of divine teaching is, according to al-Ghazālī, intuition or inspiration (*ilhām*). Intuition is the awakening by universal soul in the individual human soul in proportion to its purity and receptivity, and the degree of its preparedness.<sup>60</sup> Intuition, however, is inferior to revelation, for revelation is the clear manifestation of the Divine Command, while intuition is the hinting point there at. The knowledge which is derived from revelation is called 'prophetic knowledge', and that which is derived from intuition is called 'knowledge from higher (source), *al-'ilm al-laduniyyah*. It is that knowledge which is attained without mediation between the soul and its Creator. It is like radiance from the Lamp of the Invisible, shed upon a heart which is pure, at ease, and subtle. That is because all knowledge is attained and known in the substance of the Primal Universal Soul, which is present in incorporeal, primal, pure substance, through its relationship to the First intelligence i.e. Universal Mind.<sup>61</sup>

57. *Ibid.*, 2:32

58. *Ibid.*, 2:33

59. *Ar-Rasālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. 364, Cf. *Ihya*, Vol. 3, pp. 328, 329. "There are two worlds, the world of *amr* and the Created world .... every being devoid of quantity and dimension belongs to the world of *amr*; and *Ihya*, Vol. 4, p. 23: "The word of *amr* is what prevails over the created world."

60. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p. 365.

61. *Loc. cit.*

Al-Ghazālī makes a distinction between Universal Mind (*al-'aql al-Kullī*) and Universal Soul (*an-Nafs al-Kullī*) in that while the former is nobler, more perfect, stronger and nearer to the Creator, the latter is nobler, more receptive and more honourable than the rest of the creation.<sup>62</sup> Al-Ghazālī maintains that revelation is ensured from the outpouring of the Universal Mind; and from the radiation of Universal Soul comes intuition or inspiration. Now, revelation is the embellishment of prophets while intuition is the ornament of saints. But as regards revealed knowledge, as the soul is below the intelligence, and the saints below the prophets, so also is intuition below revelation, but stronger in comparison to vision (*ru'yā*), i.e., perceptual knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

Al-Ghazālī holds that revealed knowledge belongs exclusively to apostles and ceased with them, but intuitive knowledge is possessed by both prophets and saints.<sup>64</sup> Thus, knowledge from on high belongs to prophets as well as saints. Al-Ghazālī refers to the story of *Khidr*, for Allah said of him: "And We have taught him knowledge from Ourselves".<sup>65</sup> Al-Ghazālī talks about the esoteric knowledge of 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib, the fourth rightly guided Caliph of Islam, and quotes him as saying "The Apostle made his tongue enter my mouth and a thousand gates of knowledge were opened unto me, and with each gates of knowledge were opened unto me, and with each gate another thousand gates."<sup>66</sup> The knowledge from on high, according to al-Ghazālī, cannot be received by study and deduction.<sup>67</sup> To him the noblest and the highest of all sciences is to know Allah. This science is like a sea, the depth of which cannot be fathomed. In this science, the highest rank is that of the prophets, then that of the saints, and finally those that follow.<sup>68</sup> In order to attain the

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 365-66.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

64. *Loc. cit.*, Cf. *Ihyā*, Eng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 62.

65. Al-Qur'an, 18:65.

66. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. pp. 366-67.

67. *Ibid.*, 367.

68. *Kitāb al-'Ilām of Ihyā*, Eng. tr., p. 135.

knowledge from on high, al-Ghazālī suggests that the souls have to be prepared and ready to receive it, and the meaning of the preparation is the removal of the impurities that have befallen them as a result of evil deeds.<sup>69</sup> Although al-Ghazālī stresses the significance of the purification of the heart for the attainment of Divine knowledge, he does not assure that it would necessarily descend upon human soul. He holds that it exclusively depends on the Will of Allah. He says, "*ilham* (inspiration) and *wahy* revelation cannot be obtained by human will. Allah says: "It is not for a man to be with Allah except by means of *wahy* or from behind the screens or by means of a messenger who reveals with His permission what he wishes."<sup>70</sup> Allah has closed the door of revelation with Prophet Muhammad(s) whereby His servants were guided, and He has kept opened the door of intuition, out of His mercy, and ordered affairs a right and placed souls in their different ranks, so that they may know that Allah shows kindness to His servants, He loves them, and gives sustenance to whom He wills, without any account.<sup>71</sup>

### 1. Human Soul and its Capability to Acquire Intuitive Knowledge

Knowledge is of many types, some of which have already been discussed. But in the acquisition of every kind of knowledge, al-Ghazālī holds that human soul plays the main role. To him, soul is the tablet of knowledge; and its abode for knowledge, for it is limited in its capacity to receive and contain different types of knowledge. The body is capable of receiving only impressions and inscriptions, but the soul is able to receive all types of knowledge without test or hindrance or fatigue or cessation.<sup>72</sup>

The nature of the soul, as al-Ghazālī describes it, is substantial, simple, enlightened, comprehending, acting, moving,

69. *Ihyā* Eng. tr. Book. 3, p. 8.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

71. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p. 168

72. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

giving perfection to instruments and bodies.<sup>73</sup> Al-Ghazālī, further, adds that the word '*qalb*' has got two meanings. First, it is a piece of flesh in the left breast and is called the heart that is hollow in the interior – the detailed description of which is found in anatomy. In the second sense *qalb* is that immaterial thing which is related to physiological heart, but at the same time receives knowledge of Allah and the spiritual world.<sup>74</sup> It is capable of both '*ilm-al-mukāshafah*, spiritual knowledge, as well as '*ilm-al-mu'āmalah* – the science of conduct.<sup>75</sup> Al-Ghazālī further, elucidates the words *rūḥ*, *nafs* and '*aql*. *Rūḥ*, too, has got two meanings: one being the material substance and another being immaterial subtle thing which is called soul, not life.<sup>76</sup> He quotes the Qur'ān on this point. "They ask you about *rūḥ*; say: it is command from my Lord."<sup>77</sup> It is the second sense that *rūḥ* is source of knowledge. *Nafs* also has two meanings. According to the first meaning it is 'passion' or the baser and lower self and according to the second meaning it is soul as described above which has been termed by the Qur'ān as *nafs-al-Mutma'innah* or the contented soul. The word '*aql*' as mentioned earlier, has got many meanings. Among these one is 'intellect' through which true nature of the material world is known, and according to another meaning it is the power to understand the secrets of different learnings.<sup>78</sup> By giving different meanings of these words al-Ghazālī intends to refer to a simple substance which is common to all of them and that is not the thing of this material world; it has come as a guest and all the organs of human body are under its command. This is the 'soul' by which al-Ghazālī neither means the animal spirit (*ar-ruḥ al-haiwāniyyah*) nor the natural spirit (*ar-ruḥ at-ṭabi'ah*).<sup>79</sup> Let us see what he means by soul.

73. Loc. cit.

74. *Ihyā* Eng. tr. Book 3, p. 2.

75. Loc. cit.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

77. Al-Qur'ān, 17:85.

78. *Ihyā*, Eng. tr. Book 3, pp. 3-4.

79. *Ihyā*, Eng. tr. Book 3, pp. 3-4.

... the soul I mean only that perfect, simple substance which is concerned solely with remembering and studying and reflection and discrimination and careful consideration. It is receptive of all types of knowledge and does not weary of receiving images which are abstract, immaterial and this substance is the ruler of the spirits (i.e., these aforementioned and the controller of the faculties, and all serve it and comply with its command. Now, the rational soul, by which I mean this substance, has a special name with every group of people. The philosophers call this substance "the rational soul" (*an-nafs an-nāṭiqah*), and the Qur'ān calls it the "contented soul" and the *ṣūfis* call it the "spirit" and sometimes the "heart", but though the names differ, the meaning is one that does not differ. In our opinion the "heart" and the "spirit" and the contented soul, are names of the rational soul, and the rational soul is the living substance which exists and acts and comprehends, and when we use the term "spirit" in an absolute sense or the word "heart", we mean by it only this substance.<sup>80</sup>

In view of al-Ghazālī, human being is comprised of three constituents: the body, the accident and the simple substance. The animal spirit is a subtle thing like a lamp, which has been kindled and fixed in the glass-vessel of the heart, by which al-Ghazālī means that conical object which is suspended in the breast. Life is the light of lamp and blood is its oil, and feeling and movements are its flames, and the passion is its smoke, the force seeking for substance (i.e. appetite), which is situated in the liver, is its servant, guard and protector, and this spirit is found in all the animals.<sup>81</sup> This spirit neither follows the right road to knowledge nor the path which leads one to the creator. It is only a servant, a captive that dies with the death of the body.<sup>82</sup> Man is laid under obligations and addressed by Allah because of another element found only in him, which is over and above the former and is

80. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. pp. 194-95.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-96.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

applicable especially to him. And that meaning indicates the rational soul and the spirit-at-rest, and this spirit is neither a body nor an accident, for it proceeded at the Command of Allah.<sup>83</sup>

Al-Ghazālī pleads that the command of the Creator is neither a body nor an accident, but a Divine force like Universal Mind, (*al-'Aql-al-Awwal*) and the Tablet and the Pen, and they are simple substances free from materiality. They are incorporeal radiances, intellectual and without sensibility.<sup>84</sup> The spirit or the heart, as al-Ghazālī used the term, derives from the substances mentioned above, and it neither disappears nor passes into nothingness, nor dies, but is separated from the body and expects to return to it on the Day of Resurrection. And that has been declared in the *Shari'ah* and is authenticated by these sciences which are established by categorical proofs.. Hence, al-Ghazālī holds, it is evident that the rational spirit is neither a body nor an accident; indeed it is an abiding, eternal substance, and incorruptible.<sup>85</sup>

Al-Ghazālī claims that only simple substance, i.e., the spirit or the heart, receives images of things known, and understands the real meaning of existing thing. It is capable to do so without being concerned with their actual selves or corporeal forms, for the rational soul has the capacity of knowing the real meaning of humanity without seeing a human being, as it is acquainted with the angels and demons.

Al-Ghazālī terms soul as the house of knowledge, divine knowledge is the goal to which human soul is destined to move.<sup>86</sup> Man's soul has got a natural capacity of knowing truth. Allah says about soul: "I placed this trust upon the heavens and earth and the mountains, but only man has borne it."<sup>87</sup> In the interpretation of the above verse of the Qur'ān al-Ghazālī maintains that soul has got such a special attribute which is not possessed by the heavens,

83. *Loc. cit.*

84. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

85. *Loc. cit.*

86. *Ihyā'*, Eng. tr. Book 3, p. 9.

87. Al-Qur'ān, 33:72.

the earth and the mountains. That is why, they have been made subservient to man. The trust is divine knowledge or *tawhid*.<sup>88</sup>

Al-Ghazālī refers to *ṣūfis* who hold that the heart possesses an organ of sight like the body, and outward things are seen with the outward eye, and the inward realities with the eye of the mind. The Prophet(s) said: "Every servant has two eyes in his heart" and when Allah wishes well to one of His servants He opens eyes of his heart, so that he may see what is hidden from his outward sight.<sup>89</sup> He says that the vision is a subtle essence or *latīfah* with which spiritual things are seen.<sup>90</sup> As the eye is concerned with the sight of visible things and the hearing is attentive in listening to sounds, and the tongue is alert to form words, and as the animal spirit is often the delights of passion, and the natural spirit loves the pleasures of eating and drinking, so also the 'contented spirit, by which al-Ghazālī means the heart – the simple substance, seeks only knowledge and is not satisfied without it.<sup>91</sup>

Al-Ghazālī observes that knowledge is implanted within all human souls and all of them are supposed to be capable of receiving all types of knowledge. Only a soul may miss its appointed share, because of something intervening or something occurring to it unexpectedly from outside.<sup>92</sup> So, the rational human soul, al-Ghazālī proceeds, is worthy to be enlightened by Universal soul, and remains competent to receive intelligible images from it, by the power of original purity and its primal innocence.<sup>93</sup> Al-Ghazālī has some reservations on this issue, and contends that all the human souls cannot receive the knowledge from on high, because some souls have become diseased in this world and are prevented from apprehending the true meaning of things.<sup>94</sup>

88. *Ihyā'*, Eng. tr. Book 3, pp. 15-16.

89. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p. 198.

90. *Ihyā'*, Eng. tr. Book 3, p. 19.

91. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p. 200; *Kimiya-ye-Sa'-adat*, Beng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 67.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-69.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 369.

Al-Ghazālī refers to the obstacles or hurdles which prohibit the human soul to acquire the knowledge of the spiritual world. He compares it with mirror and says that a picture cannot be seen in a mirror if the stuff with which it is made is spoiled by impurities. In the same way, the human soul may be defiled with the impurities of sins owing to greed, passion and low desires. Facts of the spiritual world are not reflected in a human soul, if the impurities of sins are not removed just like the removal of impurities is required for the reflection of pictures in a mirror.<sup>95</sup> Another obstacle which prevents the soul from acquiring spiritual knowledge is the lack of proper direction. If a mirror is not directed towards of figure or picture, nothing will appear on it. In the same way the light of truth is not reflected in a soul in case the object of enquiry not being properly directed towards it, although it is clean and pure.<sup>96</sup> A picture cannot be seen in a mirror if something exists between a mirror and a picture or figure. So also, if there is a veil between a human soul and a thing desired, its true picture cannot be reflected in that soul.<sup>97</sup> Al-Ghazālī further elucidates another obstacle which hinders the real knowledge, and that is the ignorance of proper method. For instance, if a student pursues an unknown subject, it will not be possible to understand it until he adopts the proper method. The prescribed method of the learned, and various kinds of relations of his subject with other sciences are to be essentially studied as a prerequisite condition for the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge stretches its roots in different fields, and one has to know how to unite the scattered roots. Knowledge cannot arise unless the mode of union is known. If one does not stand in front of a mirror, one cannot see one's face-therein. If the mirror is kept in front of some one's face, he cannot see his back. So, there are also certain conditions of acquiring knowledge.<sup>98</sup>

95. *Ihyā'* Eng. tr. Book 3, pp. 13-14.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

97. *Ibid.* p. 15.

98. *Loc. cit.*

Al-Ghazālī holds the view that knowledge is implanted within all human souls at the time of their creation, and due to their worldly engagement, the capability of receiving impressions from the universal soul remains suspended and the clouds of forgetfulness affect minds.<sup>99</sup> Some souls occupy themselves with study, and they seek to recover their original condition and their weaknesses disappear by the application of certain simple remedies.<sup>100</sup> Some of them study throughout their lives and occupy themselves with learning, even then fail to recover their original state, as their infirmities are not wiped out by the proper use of the simplest remedies. Such a soul lapses in forgetfulness.<sup>101</sup> Al-Ghazālī talks about another class of souls who study all their lives, and occupy themselves in learning and trying to regain perfection, all their days, but fail to understand anything, because of the corruption of their natural dispositions. For, their dispositions are corrupt and not responsive to cure.<sup>102</sup> Some of the souls, al-Ghazālī says, learn and then forget, they find little light and some feeble illumination.<sup>103</sup> The cause of these distinctions, according to al-Ghazālī, is the souls preoccupation with this world. When this blockade is removed, the souls succeed to acknowledge the existence of knowledge from on high and realize that they were wiser in their original state. And that they were purer when they were first created than their present state, and their ignorance emerged because of their association with this gross body and remaining in this abode of trouble and place of darkness.<sup>104</sup>

Al-Ghazālī remarks that *ṣūfis* are interested in acquiring knowledge through *ilhām*, i.e., intuition or inspiration.<sup>105</sup> Now, the question arises: how one can gain the power of intuition? Al-

99. *Ar-Risālat al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p. 369.

100. *Loc. cit.*

101. *Loc. cit.*

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 370.

104. *Loc. cit.*

105. *Ihyā'* Eng. tr. Book 3, p. 22.

Ghazālī says that it requires rigorous spiritual labour and patience and, also, carefulness towards duty.<sup>106</sup> In order to gain this special kind of knowledge one should save oneself from the condemnable evils, cutting all connections with what is other than Allah and also directing all efforts towards Allah. When it is earned, Allah Himself becomes the caretaker of human soul. He saves it by enkindling the light of knowledge in soul.<sup>107</sup> When Allah takes responsibility a particular soul, mercy falls on it, light sparkles, breast expands, and the secrets of the spiritual world are divulged to it. By the help of Allah, the screens of darkness are carried away from the upper portion of one's soul and real nature of divine affairs comes to him.<sup>108</sup> In this connection al-Ghazālī opines that a novice who is desirous to have knowledge of the Divine reality should first of all purify his soul and then make efforts with true and sincere intention to that direction.<sup>109</sup>

According to al-Ghazālī, the secrets of the heaven and earth are unfolded to the hearts of Prophets and friends of Allah (*awliya Allah*). A flood of light illumines their breasts. It is not due to their acquired knowledge by efforts but due to their spiritual exercise, full of freedom from worldly connections and full of devotion of all their energies to Allah.<sup>110</sup> By this, souls become vacant for Allah and, the screens between the (*al-Lawḥ-al-Mahfūz*) Guarded Tablet and the mirror of the soul are removed. And, thus, the picture of every thing that will occur up to the Day of Resurrection preserved in the Guarded Tablet will be reflected on the mirror of the soul. If no screen remain between the two, what is inscribed on the Guarded Tablet is reflected in the mirror of the soul. The wind of *latifah* sometimes removes the screen from the mirror of the soul, and discloses what is in the Guarded Tablet.<sup>111</sup>

106. *Kimiyā-ye-Sa'ādat*, Beng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 56.

107. *Iḥyā*, Eng. tr. Book 3, p. 22.

108. *Loc. cit.*

109. *Loc. cit.*

110. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Al-Ghazālī claims that the knowledge which has been bestowed upon a soul during the time of its creation does not disappear, but lapses only to forgetfulness. When a soul succeeds to purify itself from lusts and passions, it recovers its earlier position and the fetters of forgetfulness are thrown away, and the soul gets back to its original state. In that stage it can remember what it had forgotten in the days of sickness, i.e., forgetfulness. What the soul had learnt did not disappear, it was only forgotten; and there is a distinction between obliteration and forgetfulness. For, obliteration is the disappearance of what is engraved and impressed, while forgetfulness is the obscuring of impressions, and it is like the mist or cloud that veil the light of the sun from the eyes of the on-lookers and it is different from the sunset.<sup>112</sup> From this al-Ghazālī wants to conclude that knowledge which potentially exists in human soul does not totally pass away or get ruined, it subsists implicitly, with the aid of spiritual exercises there remains the possibility of its recovery in its original shape.

### Limitations of Sense-Perception and Reason

According to al-Ghazālī, when a man gets himself freed from the impurities of heart, and diverts his full attention towards the things of the spiritual world his intuitive faculty is awakened. He may receive information of the celestial world that may not be received by the intellectual process, i.e., sense-perception and reason. Al-Ghazālī highlights the role of sense perception in the acquisition of the knowledge of the phenomenal world. But, side by side, he suggests the limitations of the sense-perception in the process of cognition. Al-Ghazālī says that the senses are created only for acquiring the knowledge of the material world. They can not help in acquiring knowledge of the spiritual world,<sup>113</sup> the world which lies even beyond the reach of reason, a higher apparatus of knowledge than sense-perception. 'It is not improbable,' he points out in one place, 'O you who inhabit the world of reason, that beyond reason there exists another plane at

112. *Ar-Risālat-al-Laduniyyah*, Eng. tr. p. 371.

113. *Kimiyā-Sa'ādat*, Beng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 55.

which appear things that do not appear in reason, just as it is not improbable that reason should be a plane transcending discrimination and sensation, in which strange and marvellous things are revealed that sensation and discrimination fall short of attaining.<sup>114</sup> Al-Ghazālī does not deny the significance of the intellectual knowledge. He wants to show that it has some limitations which make it unable to attain the light which can be brought by intuition. He says that the knowledge acquired by study and deduction is no doubt a good thing but it is limited in comparison to the knowledge of prophets and saints. Because their hearts receive knowledge from Allah Himself. They do not depend on human beings for their knowledge.<sup>115</sup>

### Knowledge of Allah Through Intuition

Knowledge of God is the most crucial problem of epistemology. Controversy is very often found as to whether any authentic knowledge of God is possible or not. In the theistic religions, the knowledge of God is the most important issue. In every religious scripture some informations regarding God are found. Since, God is the Central theme of all the theistic religions, the followers of different creeds do make some attempt to acquire the knowledge of God. They, naturally, do have eagerness to know the object whom they worship. In Islam, the Qur'ān is the tradition of the Prophet(s), in which also we can have some information regarding Allah. It is also held that Allah being the creator of the world, can be known through guidance of rightly guided ones and contemplation of His creation. Muslim mystics, that is the Sūfis, claim that Allah can be known through another way with the employment of a special spiritual faculty. When one purifies oneself from the worldliness, concentrates and contemplates on Allah, the Most High, His majesty may kindly disclose some light regarding Himself to that soul.

114. Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Jawahir al-Ghawali*; Cairo: 1343 A.H, p. 132. *Faith and Practice*, p. 64; Cf. Shaikh 'Abd al-Qadir- Jilani, *Futuh-al-Ghaib*, Urdu translation, Lahore: 1344 A.H. p. 21, Discourse-9.

115. *Kimīyā-Sa'adat*, Beng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 56.

primary source of knowledge regarding Allah. Next to the Quran is the

Al-Ghazālī, turning to sūfism in his later phase, approaches this issue to a sūfistic view-point. To him, spiritual knowledge includes among other things the knowledge of Allah.<sup>116</sup> Rather, he contends that Divine knowledge is the best of all kinds of knowledge.<sup>117</sup> According to al-Ghazālī, there are various grades of the knowledge of Allah. The lowest grade is the faith of common people based on authority and tradition. At a higher level is the knowledge of the learned based on deduction and reflection. But the highest kind of knowledge is gained through *mukāshafah*.<sup>118</sup>

Al-Ghazālī points out that *al-'ilm al-mukāshafah* is related to the knowledge of Allah and the essence of things, and that it cannot be attained without *al-'ilm al-muk'āmalah* of which the love of Allah and thirst for the knowledge of reality are the most important aspects. He says categorically that if a man occupies himself with the purification of the heart, but does not seek Allah, he will not attain the knowledge of Allah. Whatever then he attains will not be *al-'ilm al-mukāshafah*.<sup>119</sup> From this it is also clear that mere purification of heart and total abstinence from sinful works do not suffice to have the knowledge of Allah.

Al-Ghazālī contends that the knowledge of Allah is related to the love of Allah. He considers the knowledge of Allah as a condition for the perfection of man; because without it love of Allah is not possible. But knowledge of Allah does not mean love of Allah in all instances. Hence, love of Allah is a higher ideal than mere knowledge.<sup>120</sup> To al-Ghazālī, the highest stage of knowledge is attained through the highest form of love. Knowledge may be perceptual and supra-perceptual.<sup>121</sup> The former is the apprehension of objects and their love is common to all men and animals. Allah cannot be known immediately through perceptual knowledge; consequently He cannot be an

116. *Ihyā*, Eng. tr., Book 4, p. 312.

117. *Loc. cit.*

118. *Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazālī*, p. 109. the author refers to al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā*, Vol. 3, p. 14; and Vol 1, pp. 18-19.

119. *Ihyā* Vol. 3, p. 12.

120. *Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazālī*, p. 122.

121. *Ihyā*, Vol. 4, p. 255.

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object of love determined by such knowledge. Knowledge of Allah is supra-perceptual. Man alone is capable of such knowledge. This knowledge occurs through faith, reflection, reasoning and mystic experience, the enumeration being in the ascending order of spiritual development. Love of Allah is associated, in the heart of the seeker, with every type of supra-perceptual knowledge of Allah. But the highest and the most complete love is associated with intuition, the highest type of knowledge.<sup>122</sup>

**Relation between Intellect and Intuition**

Intellect ('*aql*), as an independent source of knowledge, has got an important place in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. The word '*aql*' has been used in different senses. It refers commonly in the usage of theologians to demonstrative reason. It is the activity (or faculty) that proves, defends, and elicits conclusions implied by the premises. In a more general sense, '*aql*' is man's basic apprehending faculty, that which distinguishes him from animals and by which he acquires theoretical knowledge.<sup>123</sup> But the term also refers to "light of inner perception" or 'light of certainty' (*Yaqīn*), as used by the ṣūfīs.<sup>124</sup> Al-Ghazālī maintains that '*aql*', as man's basic instinctive reason (*gharizat al-'aql*), refers to the same thing denoted by the ṣūfī term *mukāshafah*. Thus, while al-Ghazālī distinguishes the mystical apprehension from '*aql*' as demonstrative reason, he identifies it with '*aql*' as the basic human cognitive faculty.<sup>125</sup> Here it will not be out of the place to point out that in the Twentieth Century Bergson also defined intuition as an instinct that is self-conscious. Al-Ghazālī's definition of mystic experience in terms of instinctive reason is very close to Bergson's view.

Al-Ghazālī says that intellectual knowledge is simple in itself, but it gives rise to a composite knowledge, which includes

all the states of the simple types of knowledge. That composite knowledge is the knowledge attained by ṣūfīs- in the course of their journey through mystic states.<sup>126</sup> Al-Ghazālī adds that ṣūfīs have evolved a simple method denoted by a particular way of life which combines the two types of knowledge. Different stages in a ṣūfī's journey towards the ultimate knowledge are termed as the mystic state (*ḥal*), the spiritual condition (*al-waqt*), audition (*samā'*), ecstasy (*wajd*), longing (*ṭalab* or '*ishq*'), intoxication (*sukr*), sobriety (*sahw*), affirmation (*ithb'at*) and effacement and poverty (*faqr*) and the passing away of self (*fanā*). The peculiar notions of saintship and discipleship, and the position of *shaikh* and his relation with his disciples, and what is involved in their states, together with spiritual illumination, also form ṣūfistic epistemological terminology.<sup>127</sup> So, al-Ghazālī highlights the importance of intellectual knowledge as a prerequisite condition for the acquisition of intuitive knowledge, and also in leading a ṣūfistic life.

Al-Ghazālī, as we have noticed, has given higher status to intuitive knowledge in comparison with intellectual knowledge. But in every aspect of life, be it either religious or worldly, he does not ignore the importance of intellectual pursuits. Al-Ghazālī maintains that intellectual knowledge is somehow linked with intuitive knowledge. To him, human soul is capable of attaining perfection, but to attain it, it has to pass through many stages of development, viz., sensuous (*maḥsūṣah*), imaginative (*mutakhayyilāt*) instinctive (*muḥumāt*) rational (*ma'qūlāt*) and the Divine (*Ilahiyat*). In the first place, man is like a moth, which has no memory, and beats time and again against the candle. In the second stage, man is like a lower animal which, once beaten, runs away when he sees a stick. In the third stage, he resembles a higher animal, e.g. a horse which instinctively avoids a danger and flees away from a lion who is its natural enemy, but is not afraid of a camel. In the fourth stage, he transcends this limit also.

122. *Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazālī*, p. 123.

123. *Iḥyā'* Vol. 1, p. 75.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

125. *Loc. cit.*

126. *Ar-Risālat*, Eng. tr. p. 359.

127. *Ibid.*, pp. 359-60.

He apprehends objects which are beyond the scope of his senses and can form general concepts underlying particular objects. In the fifth stage, he is able to apprehend the reality of spiritual things. This stage is reached by prophets and saints. At this stage, the reality of the soul and the significance of other spiritual things are disclosed to a man.<sup>128</sup> With this illustration al-Ghazālī wants to show that in order to reach intuitive knowledge a man needs to pass through the intellectual stage. So, intellectual knowledge is an essential phase for reaching to intuitive knowledge.

Al-Ghazālī maintains that some sorts of divine knowledge (*ma'rifah*) may be achieved from the study of 'the nature'. The world where we live, is the creation of Allah. So, the Creator may be known through the observation of his creation, the world.<sup>129</sup> Al-Ghazālī adds that with the aids of external senses such as eye, nose, etc., the internal faculties such reason, conscience, and the power of deliberation i.e., various artistic skills truths related to this world may be realized which ultimately leads to the *ma'rifah* of Allah.<sup>130</sup> It may be inferred that al-Ghazālī accepts the importance artistic skills and positive sciences that prepare man for intuitive knowledge. If '*ma'rifah* of Allah' is the highest end (*sa'ādah as-sa'ādāt*) of human life, intellect that leads to intuition would be an important means, or, at least, a starting point on the way to attain the ultimate goal.

In this chapter we have confined our study to the elaboration of al-Ghazālī's views on the different sources of knowledge, leaving the issue of the nature of knowledge to be dealt with in the next chapter.

128. *Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazālī*, p. 99.

129. *Kimiyā-ye-Sa'adat*, Beng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 40.

130. *Loc. cit.*

## Chapter – III

### Al-Ghazālī's Notion of the Nature of Knowledge

The nature of knowledge is one of the three basic problems of epistemology. In this Chapter, we shall see whether al-Ghazālī does have any concern with the nature of knowledge. A careful study of al-Ghazālī's philosophy may reveal that he is aware of the significance of the problem. He might not have elaborated each and every aspect of the issue very clearly and distinctly, like the modern epistemologists, but this does not mean that he had no idea of the relevant issues.

Al-Ghazālī's division of the worlds into (i) *al-'ālam al-mulk wa shahāda* (the material and the phenomenal world) (ii) *al-'ālam al-malakūt* (the divine world), and (iii) *al-'ālam al-jaharūt* (the world of mind – reason, will and power) is indicative of his concern for distinguishing various kinds of knowledge and their nature. The material world is also named by al-Ghazālī as *al-'ālam al-mahsusāt*. He maintains that in comparison with the divine world the material world is very small and limited.<sup>2</sup> The material world is non-static, and always subject to change. That is why, the knowledge of this world cannot be flawless and perfect.<sup>3</sup> Al-Ghazālī says that the knowledge of the material or phenomenal world is achieved with the help of the five senses. Human mind cannot have the knowledge of this world directly. The impressions, the senses receive from the phenomenal world reach the human soul through different ways. If the sense-organs do not function properly, there is every possibility of the origination of the false impressions which may ultimately lead to a wrong conception of a particular object.<sup>4</sup>

1. *Ihyā'*, Vol. 4, p. 216.

2. *Kimiyā-ye-Sa'adat*, Beng. tr., Vol. 1, p. 52.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. *Loc. cit.*

Al-Ghazālī holds that a phenomenon or appearance is a relative term, for a thing necessarily appears to, or is concealed from, something other than itself, and thus, its appearance and non-appearance are both relative. Further, its appearance and non-appearance are also relative to perceptive faculties i.e. the senses.<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghazālī gives an account of many defects in these faculties. Among these sense of sight is most important, it is blurred with so many defects and obstacles that correct information can hardly be received through it. The eye does not behold itself. It neither sees what is very near to it nor what is very far away from it. The eye can perceive the exterior surfaces of things but not their interiors.<sup>6</sup> Al-Ghazālī adds that the eye only sees the fraction of what exists, for, all concepts and many percepts are beyond its reach. The eye does not see what is infinite. What it sees is the attributes of known bodies, and these can only be conceived as finite. The other defect of the faculty of sight is that it apprehends the large as small. It sees the colossal sun in the size of a bowl, and the stars like silver-pieces scattered upon a carpet of azure.<sup>7</sup> From al-Ghazālī's explanation of the power of vision it seems that the eye cannot observe a particular object as it is. Due to some of its limitations the real things, to a large extent, remain unknown. Al-Ghazālī's view on this issue seems to have some similarity with that of the critical realists of the twentieth century, according to whom, what we perceive are sense-data, but not the physical object itself.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Ghazālī maintains that the world of the celestial bodies lies beyond the capacity of the senses. The material world and things found in it, are the objects of sense-perception.<sup>9</sup> The 'supernal world' is a world invisible to the majority of men. No man can approach near Allah unless he advances towards the very centre of the Fold of the Divine Holiness. By the 'world of

5. *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, Eng. tr. p. 80.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-89.

8. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 25-26.

9. *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, Eng. tr. p. 93.

the Divine Holiness', al-Ghazālī means the world that transcends the apprehension of the senses and imagination.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Ghazālī says that the phenomenal light can be conceived of as disappearing with the sinking of the Sun, and as assuming a veil in order that the shadow may appear: while the Divine Light, which is the condition of all appearances cannot be conceived as disappearing.<sup>11</sup> Al-Ghazālī conceives relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds. To him, the visible world is the first step in the journey upto the 'realm supernal'. He argues that if there were no relationship between the two worlds, no inter-connection was possible, and then all upward progress would be inconceivable.<sup>12</sup> For him due to the divine mercy the visible world has got a correspondence with the 'realm supernal'. That is why, al-Ghazālī claims that there is not a single thing in this 'world of sense' that is not a symbol of something yonder.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Ghazālī further holds that one thing in this world may symbolize several things in the 'realm supernal' and also that one thing in the latter may have several symbols in the 'world of visible'. According to him, a thing is called typical of symbolic when it resembles or corresponds to its archetype in some aspect.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Ghazālī clarifies his position regarding the 'world supernal' by saying that he does not mean by it the world of the seven heavens, though they are "above" in respect to our world of sense-perception. These heavens are equally present to our apprehension, and also to that of the lower animals.<sup>15</sup> A man finds the doors of the 'realm celestial' closed on him; neither he does

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

12. *Loc. cit.*

13. *Loc. cit.*; Iqbal also holds the same view as he says, "...If we carefully examine and interpret experience, following the clue furnished by the Qur'ān which regards experience within and without as symbolic of a reality described by it, as the First and the Last. The visible and the invisible." Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 31.

14. *Ibid.*, 126.

15. *Ibid.*, 95.

become of nor belongs to that realm unless as he quotes the verses of the Qur'an: "Oneday the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens."<sup>16</sup> Some people may transcend the limitations of the visible world and heavens, and proceed to approach the 'Presence of Dominical'. Thus, mankind does make an attempt to rise to the world of the 'Highest Height'.<sup>17</sup>

About the prophets, al-Ghazālī says that when their ascents reached the world of 'realm celestial', they attained the utmost goal, and from that place looked down upon a totality of the 'world invisible' for, al-Ghazālī maintains, he who is with Allah, has the keys of the unseen.<sup>18</sup> When an individual reaches that plane of Reality, he knows that how the causes of existing things descend into the world of sense. As al-Ghazālī has already pointed out, the world of sense is an effect of the yonder world of cause, resulting from it just as the shadow results from a body, or as a fruit from that which fructuates, or as the effect from a cause.<sup>19</sup> The key to this knowledge of the effect is sought and found in the cause. And for this reason, al-Ghazālī maintains, the world of sense is a prototype of the world of the 'realm celestial'. For the thing compared is in some sort parallel, and bears resemblance, to the thing compared therewith, whether that resemblance be remote or near.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Ghazālī's division of the worlds seems to have some resemblance to the Kantian division. Kant divides the worlds into the phenomenal and noumenal ones. The former is the object of our sense-perception, the world of appearance, but the latter world—world-in-itself is unknowable by sense perception. Kant maintains that we cannot transcend our experience, nor we have a priori knowledge of the supersensible of things-in-themselves (*noumena*), of things as they are apart from the way they affect

16. Al-Qur'ān, 14:48.

17. *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, Eng. tr. p. 95.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

19. *Loc. cit.*

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

consciousness. Knowledge involves perception, but things in themselves cannot be perceived by the senses; through sense-perception we know only the way things appear to consciousness, not what they are in themselves.<sup>21</sup> Kant adds that they cannot even be perceived or intuited by the intellect. We cannot prove, for example, that behind everything there is a substance in an intelligible world. We can, however, as Kant maintains, think of such a thing-in-itself, speak of it as something to which none of the predicates of sense-perception applies, say that it is not in space nor in time, that it does not change, and so on. Not a single category, however, can be applied to it, because we have no means of knowing whether anything corresponding to it exists. Thus, Kant holds that thing-in-itself is essentially unknowable, but the concept of a thing-in-itself is not self-contradictory, for, we surely cannot maintain that the phenomenal order is the only possible one. We can have sensible knowledge only of a sensible thing, not of a thing-in-itself.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in Kantian epistemology thing-in-itself, i.e., the noumenon, cannot be an object of knowledge. Hence in Kant's theory of knowledge no knowledge of God is possible. Because God transcends our sense-perception.

As far the division of the worlds, al-Ghazālī and Kant do have some similarities, but as far as the nature of knowledge is concerned they have got some significant differences. Al-Ghazālī's *al-'alam-al malakut*; i.e. (the world supernal) can be known by prophets and mystics. In chapter second we have already elaborated that prophets and mystics can transcend the limitation of the perceptual world. With the purification of their souls from the impurities of the senses, lusts and greeds, they may spiritually reach to the world celestial which is the original abode of the souls.

The difference between al-Ghazālī and Kant has even been pointed out by Dr. Iqbal. He writes: "Kant consistently with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of the knowledge of

21. Frank, Thilly, *A History of Philosophy*, Revised by Ledger Wood. Allahabad: Central Publishing House, Third edition, 1984, p. 427.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 428.

God. Ghazālī, finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience, and then found an independent content for religion. In this way he succeeded in securing for religion the right to exist independently of science and metaphysics."<sup>23</sup>

To sum up the entire problem, in al-Ghazālī's epistemology, both the '*ālam-al-mulk*' and '*ālam-al-malakūt*' are objects of knowledge. Al-'*ālam al-mulk*' may be known by every individual, because it is perceivable, but the '*ālam-al-malakūt*' being unperceivable, requires some faculty other than senses to be known. Here, he maintains that every individual cannot know this world. Since this is the supra-sensible world, this can only be known by the development of such a faculty that can transcend the limits of sensation. According to al-Ghazālī, only prophets and mystics have got such qualities.<sup>24</sup> Thus he holds that human beings are different according to their dispositions. Only a few are capable of attaining the highest form of knowledge that is certain, definite, unchangeable and absolute. Naturally human knowledge of this world is not certain, definite and absolute. It is susceptible to change, is indefinite and cannot be fully relied upon.

23. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 5.

24. *Ihyā*, Eng. tr. vol. 1, p. 24.

## Chapter – IV

### Al-Ghazālī on the Validity of Knowledge

In the previous two chapters, we have dealt with al-Ghazālī's views on the sources and nature of knowledge. The other basic problem with reference to al-Ghazālī's epistemology is that of the validity of knowledge. As discussed in the first chapter three tests of the validity of knowledge have been accepted by different schools of philosophy which are: correspondence, coherence and pragmatic theories.

The problem of the validity of knowledge has not been explicitly discussed by al-Ghazālī. Nevertheless, from the study of his works it seems that he is not totally indifferent to the importance of this problem in theory of knowledge. But he has not elaborated this problem with special care. Here, we shall try to construct his view on the problem of the validity of knowledge. According to al-Ghazālī, we cognize the external world and its objects through the five senses. He maintains that man's information about the world is by means of perception, and every perception of the perceptibles is created so that man may have acquaintance with a world from among existents. By 'worlds', al-Ghazālī means 'classes of existents'.<sup>1</sup> There seems to be some resemblance between the correspondence theory of truth and the above position of al-Ghazālī. In correspondence theory, a statement would be considered to be true or valid when it describes the fact or agrees with the actual situation. Al-Ghazālī would also like to point out the same thing by saying that with the help of the faculties of perception man makes himself acquainted with the world i.e. the actual situation of the world. On the basis of this acquaintance he makes judgments about different things of the world. Man's acquaintance and the formation of his judgments should be in correspondence with the reality. Al-Ghazālī maintains that all knowledge of the sciences and arts

1. *Faith and Practice*, p. 63.

acquired through the senses, and this knowledge corresponds to four kinds of existence, namely, material (*jismānī*), factual (*ḥaqīqī*), ideational (*khayālī*) and intellectual ('*aqlī*'). Our ordinary knowledge of the external world is related to these four kinds of existence.<sup>2</sup> al-Ghazālī, as we have already seen, accepts reason as one of the sources of knowledge. Reason makes one capable to discern the possibility of possible things, such as, the knowledge, 'two is greater than one' and 'one individual cannot be in two different places at the same time'.<sup>3</sup> Here, al-Ghazālī seems to have put stress on consistency and coherence in knowledge. The coherence theory of truth or knowledge places its trust in the consistency or harmony of judgments. Al-Ghazālī is also an advocate of these criteria. Despite his refutation of the law of causation, al-Ghazālī considers sense-perception to be the source of knowledge about the physical world. But he is not a thorough empiricist. He, at the same time, highlights the significance of reason and intellect both in their scientific and metaphysical senses. Al-Ghazālī's skepticism that was caused by his denial of casuality led him in his quest for dependable, absolute and definite knowledge to test another source of knowledge, that is mystic experience or intuition.

### Empirical Knowledge

Although al-Ghazālī accepts the role of sense-perception in the knowledge of the phenomenal world, he has pointed out its limitations which sometimes lead us to erroneous conclusions. Empirical knowledge is based on the law of causation, but al-Ghazālī denies the necessary link between cause and effect. According to him, the affirmation of one does not entail the affirmation of the other; nor does not its denial entail denial of the other.<sup>4</sup> By this al-Ghazālī wants to point out that the necessary

2. *Kimīyā-ye-Sa'ādat*, p. 12.

3. Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb-al-'Ilm of Iḥyā'*, Eng. tr. pp. 226-27.

4. Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falasifah*, Eng. tr. by Sabih Ahmad Kamali, Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958, p. 185.

relations found in deductive logic and mathematics cannot be conceived regarding the causal relation. The denial of any conclusion arrived at on the ground of deductive logic—the presence of a person in two different places at the same time, leads us to contradiction. The same is the cause with mathematics, we cannot deny the necessity that two and two is equal to four. But, such contradiction will not occur if we deny the necessary connection of any two things, which we term as 'cause' and 'effect'; such as the quenching of thirst and drinking water; satisfaction of hunger and eating, burning and contact with fire, light and the rise of the sun etc.<sup>5</sup> By the denial of so-called necessary relation between cause and effect al-Ghazālī points out the uncertainty and unreliability of empirical knowledge that is based on the principles of causation and the uniformity of nature. Here, he stresses on the role of the Decree of Allah which preceded the existence of all events and incidents. If succession of two events is noticed regularly, it is because He has destined these events to occur in that fashion; not because the relation in itself is necessary and inseverable. Al-Ghazālī's point is that Allah has the power to create any 'effect' or 'event' independently of what is supposed to be its 'cause'.<sup>6</sup> This power of Allah cannot be revealed through observation—a condition of empirical method. By observation we notice the fact of burning whenever a thing comes in contact with fire. This only shows one event occurs after the other. But the inherent cause of burning cannot be determined by observation.<sup>7</sup> Al-Ghazālī explains mysteries of the world with an illustration: If a man sits in fire covering himself with asbestos will remain unaffected, whereas he who has not devised any such device will disbelieve it.<sup>8</sup> The same is with the case of different mysteries of the world which cannot be conceived by our perceptual faculties. Thus, al-Ghazālī shows the shortcomings of our perceptual faculties, which are the

5. *Loc. cit.*

6. *Loc. cit.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

foundation of empirical knowledge, in detecting the Inherent Principles which is the Ultimate Cause of everything in the universe.

Al-Ghazālī is of the opinion that our informations of the phenomenal world in many cases are not free from error. This happens partly due to non-static nature of this world and partly due to the limitations of our sense-organs. Human mind cannot acquire the knowledge of this world directly. If the sense-organs fail to function properly, the impressions they receive from the phenomenal world will ultimately result in error.<sup>9</sup> From this al-Ghazālī infers that the beliefs we hold about the phenomenal world are not necessarily true due to the limitations inherent in their tools and methods employed in acquiring knowledge.

### Rational Knowledge

Finding so many shortcomings in empirical method, particularly its failure to convey any accurate informations about the world of supernal, al-Ghazālī proceeds towards rational enquiry with the hope that it may satisfy the need for reliable information. Although according to al-Ghazālī the rational method is better organized and less erroneous in comparison with empiricism, it still falls short of the requirements to dealing with affairs of the reality beyond sense and reason both.<sup>10</sup>

Logic may be considered to be the proper method of any rational enquiry. The function of logic, according to al-Ghazālī, is to study the methods of demonstration, of forming syllogisms, and the application of some principles in order to evolve consistency in our thought structure. Logic is successful in its own realm, but its principles fail to lead us to the problems that our enquiry faces regarding the Ultimate Reality.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it appears that although al-Ghazālī gives weightage to logical enquiry, yet he regards it as incompetent in dealing with the Divine World and its affairs.

9. *Kimīyā ye-Sa'adat*, Beng. tr. Vol. 1, p. 52.

10. *Faith and Practice*, pp. 23-24.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

Examining different views of the philosophers (*falāsifah*) in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, al-Ghazālī comes to the conclusion that their application of rational method in dealing with the problems of the existence of Allah, the eternity of the world, physical resurrection on the Day of Judgment, and God's knowledge, particularly as to whether His knowledge is of universals only or embraces particulars, utterly fail and led them to erroneous conclusion. As these problems lie beyond the ken of the faculty of intellect or reason, it is accessible to neither to the senses nor to reason.

Al-Ghazālī's final assessment of the rational method is that it fails to grasp the significance and nature of prophetic revelation and Divine mysteries, even though it provides consistent and unequivocal judgments in different areas of knowledge that are open to man's perceptual and intellectual faculties.

### Mystical Knowledge

Now we may turn to an important part of al-Ghazālī theory of knowledge. He gives priority to the knowledge acquired by revelation and intuition over other forms of knowledge, placing at higher than intellectual knowledge. He maintains that revelation comes only to prophets, and intuitive knowledge can equally be shared by prophets and saints who with the development of their spiritual faculty acquire immediate knowledge from the unseen world which lies beyond the reach of the intellectual pursuit. It is significant to see how far al-Ghazālī is successful to prove the validity of supra-intellectual knowledge.

Al-Ghazālī seems to have realized the difficulty to establish the validity of mystical knowledge by intellectual process. He says, "It became clear to me, however, that what is most distinctive of mysticism is something which cannot be apprehended by study, but only by immediate experience (*dhawq*, means literally to taste), by ecstasy and by a moral change".<sup>12</sup> Here al-Ghazālī wants to say that the justification of mystical

12. *Faith and Practice*, pp. 54-55.

knowledge should not be sought through intellectual method. The justification of such knowledge can only be realized when one is involved in such an experience. Al-Ghazālī argues that there is a distinction between being acquainted with the definition of drunkenness and being drunk. Indeed, the drunken man while in that condition knows neither the definition of drunkenness nor the scientific account of it. The sober man, on the other hand, knows the definition of drunkenness and its basis, yet he is not drunk in the very least. Similarly, al-Ghazālī maintains, there is a difference between knowing the true nature and causes and conditions of the ascetic life, and actually leading such a life.

Although al-Ghazālī faces intellectual difficulty in the justification of mystical knowledge, he himself is very much convinced that the knowledge acquired by the mystics is valid. There is a very strong element of faith on the part of al-Ghazālī in this issue. He says:

I apprehend that mystics were the men who had real experiences, not men of words. I had already progressed as far as possible by way of intellectual apprehension. What remained for me was not to be attained by oral instruction and study but only by immediate experience and by walking in the mystic path.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Ghazālī maintains that by the practice of mystic way, among the things that necessarily became clear to him, was the true nature and special characteristics of prophetic revelation.<sup>14</sup> He considers immediate experience to be similar to actually witnessing a thing and taking it in one's hand. Such vision and certainty can be found in mysticism only.<sup>15</sup>

The justification of al-Ghazālī's views concerning testimony, reason, and intuition as the sources of knowledge may best be illustrated by an example that he himself cites. Suppose the belief at issue is that Zayd is in the house. Or one can reason and infer his existence from hearing his voice while one is outside. Or,

13. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

finally, one can go into the house and see him for oneself, directly and in full view.<sup>16</sup> The three bases for believing that Zayd is in the house are: trusted testimony, inference, and immediate experience.

However, in the case of religious belief what concerns al-Ghazālī about these three ways is not their ability to confer truth on beliefs about Allah. That is not needed since, for him, beliefs in Allah are already true in so far as they are revealed. No further epistemological justification is needed. No better one could be found.

Of the three aforementioned ways *dhawq*, immediate experience or intuition is the best, since, it fulfils al-Ghazālī's idea of religious belief as far as the believing subject is concerned. It alone is a mode of personal appropriation and inner commitment, and it alone yields the accompanying certainty beyond doubt.

If someone questions the validity and certainty of the knowledge of the *ṣūfīs*, al-Ghazālī would say that the kind of certainty that accompanies *dhawq* only come to those who have gone through the moral and spiritual preparations that a *ṣūfī* undergoes.

16. *Ihyā*, Vol. 3, pp. 13-14.

## Chapter – V

### Conclusion

Let us now briefly sum up the results of our study, and also assess and evaluate it. From our study of Greek Philosophy it appears that reason, sense-perception, and mystical experience were recognized by early philosophers as the sources of knowledge. Some rely upon the role of reason as the source of knowledge, while others based knowledge on sense-perception, i.e., experience, and still others could find certainty in mystical experience only, i.e., on intuition. Although al-Ghazālī was averse to the views of those Muslim thinkers who made Greek philosophy their model, he himself was well acquainted with it as is revealed in his work *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah* (The Aims of Philosophers). He had thoroughly studied Greek philosophy. The epistemological views of different Greek philosophers seem to have some impact on al-Ghazālī's epistemology; none the less, his epistemology is his original contribution. Al-Ghazālī is not against borrowing ideas that fit in the Islamic frame work from other philosophies provided that do not, in any way, contradict Islamic orthodoxy. Thus, it appears that on some points the Ghazalian theory of knowledge is in agreement with neo-Platonic version of Greek tradition and also with certain Christian scholastics such as Augustine.

Al-Ghazālī developed his theory of knowledge on the teachings on the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Traditions. The Qur'ān itself is final word in revelation and its authority has to be accepted by every Muslim. The Traditions of the Prophet(s) also enjoy the status of authority. So, the concept of authority as one of the sources of knowledge is present in the Qur'ān and the Traditions. Reason, sense-experience and inner experience, i.e., intuition all the three have been referred to in the Qur'ān as the sources of knowledge. The Qur'ān, in the words of Iqbal, for the first time laid down the main principles of scientific induction, emphasizing the role of observation and experiment with regard

to the physical world. At the same time the Qur'ān encouraged Muslims to think and contemplate on the signs of Allah in the universe, thus, accepting the role of reason. In no other religious scripture so much emphasis is put on perception and reason. In accordance with the teachings of the Qur'ān the holy Prophet(s) also advised and encouraged Muslims to gain knowledge from whichever source it was available. Hundreds of Traditions highlighting the value of reason and knowledge are found in the books of *Sunnā*. This emphasis on the value of reason was instrumental in the sudden flowering of sciences in the Muslim world – almost a miracle transforming a nation of illiterate people into the most advanced people of the world. Thus, it seems that al-Ghazālī was very much influenced from the study of the Qur'ān and the Traditions in moulding his epistemological outlook.

Al-Ghazālī was well acquainted with the views of the different Muslim schools of thought prevailing before him. He had critically analyzed their notions in many of his writings. It is not impossible that he was somehow influenced or, at least, enlightened by their theories of knowledge. The influence of the *ṣūfīs'* theory of knowledge has a remarkable influence on al-Ghazālī's epistemology. But al-Ghazālī contribution to it would be that he had tried to minimize the gap between intellect and intuition which was prevalent before him.

Al-Ghazālī's another important contribution to epistemology is of his view on the basic requirements of knowledge. He is possibly the first Muslim thinker who has elaborated this issue.

If we critically evaluate al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge we would notice that sense-perception should have been given more weightage as a source of knowledge. Although theoretically he accepts the role of sense-perception in the process of cognition, it practically occupies not a very significant place in his system.

We can trace some resemblance between Ghazalian and modern epistemological approaches. In modern epistemology we find some rationalist thinkers make attempt to bring out the

limitations of empiricism. Descartes, the father of modern rationalism, distinguishes three classes of "ideas", adventitious, factitious and innate. The first type comes to the mind through experience, the second type is constructed by the mind, and the third type, i.e., innate ideas, is created by God with the mind or soul itself. The innate ideas are inborn and imprinted in human soul at the time of its creation. The concept of the same kind of knowledge is found in al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. He also talks about other types of knowledge which do not come from sense-perception. We find that in this respect Ghazalian epistemology has a striking similarity with the Cartesian theory of innate ideas.

There is a likeness between al-Ghazālī's reservation regarding reason's capacity to have the knowledge of the world supernal and the Kantian approach to metaphysics. Kant maintains that with the help of pure reason we cannot acquire genuine knowledge regarding the noumenal world. And thus, he quite clearly and unequivocally refuses to admit the validity of metaphysical claims regarding self, universe and God. Al-Ghazālī also maintains that these objects exist in a realm which transcends human perception and reason. That is why, al-Ghazālī opposed the rationalistic attempt of the Muslim philosophers to arrive at proofs for the existence of Allah, soul, eternity of the world, physical resurrection etc.

According to the logical positivists, two kinds of sentences are literally meaningful. One is empirical statement, which is contingent; the other is *a priori* statement—statements of deductive logic and mathematics. Since they are *a priori*, they are necessarily true. The exponents of this school further add that metaphysical utterances being neither empirical nor *a priori* lack in cognitive meaning. Metaphysics is, therefore, meaningless. Al-Ghazālī would also be in agreement with this school in a sense, but he would reconstruct knowledge on the basis of intuition. Hence, al-Ghazālī would not agree with the logical positivists that Allah, self, supernal world etc. are not the problems to be dealt with in epistemology.

A careful study of al-Ghazālī's view of the different sources of knowledge will elucidate so many confusions which often arise in mind; it will throw a new light which might have been escaped from the notice of the scholars. Al-Ghazālī attempts to assess the value of sense-perception, reason, intuition, and revelation. He realizes the importance of reason in order to understand the religious as well as worldly problems. With some reservations he accepts sense-perception in connection with our knowledge of the material world. How much stress he puts on intellectual pursuits and scientific method will be clarified if we quote the following passage from him:

'If the soul has not been exercised in the sciences dealing with fact and demonstration, it will acquire mental phantasms which will be mistaken by it to be truths descending upon it ... Many *ṣūfīs* remain stuck for years in such figments of imagination, but they certainly would have saved from these, had they first followed the path of scientific study and acquired by laborious learning as much as the demonstrative sciences as human power could encompass...'<sup>1</sup> Besides dividing knowledge into *al-'ilm az-zāhir* and *al-'ilm al-bāṭin*, and *al-'ilm al-mu'āmalah* and *al-'ilm al-mukāshafah*, al-Ghazālī, in *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*, makes a distinction between practical sciences (*al-'ilm al-'amali*) and theoretical sciences (*al-'ilm an-nazari*). So far as the former division of knowledge is concerned, as we have already discussed in chapter II, *al-'ilm az-zahir* and *'ilm-al-mu'āmalah*, despite the minute difference between the two, may be considered to cover those branches of knowledge that are related to man's understanding of the social and natural phenomena. Of Course, these branches of human knowledge require the employment of the senses and intellect. The other two types, *'ilm al-bāṭin* and *'ilm al-mukāshafah* may be considered in general synonymous. These two refer to man's inner knowledge of himself and the ultimate reality. Obviously in this domain that lies beyond the reach of senses and that part of reason which constitutes understanding and reason. It is in this area of

1. Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-'Amal*, Cairo, 1342 A.H. pp. 35-36; Sharif, M.M., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. A, p. 622.

knowledge that man's empirical and intellectual faculties, according to al-Ghazālī, are of little use. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī holds that intuition (*mukashafah* or '*ilm al-bātin*') is a higher form of reason. In the terminology of Islamic philosophy, particularly in the philosophy of al-Ghazālī and *ṣūfis*, the term 'reason' is used in a sense broader than its ordinary connotation. The term 'reason' in Platonic tradition also embraces a broader range of psychic activity. Al-Ghazālī and prior to him other Muslim philosophers like al-Fārābī and ibn Sīna have been of the view that reason is not only a ratiocination but also an insight, a Divine spark, that is endowed with innate ideas and capable of receiving direct and immediate knowledge of super-natural reality. In this metaphysical sense, reason includes the faculty that is usually assigned to intuition or mystic experience. It is, therefore, not easy to term *ṣūfis* and Muslim philosophers like al-Ghazālī solely as rationalists or intuitionists.

Al-Ghazālī's division of knowledge into practical and theoretical sciences is based on distinction between the worldly and other worldly knowledge. '*Ilm al-'amali*', which is usually termed in Muslim philosophy as *ḥikmat al-'amali*, according to al-Ghazālī, consists of three sciences (1) the sciences dealing with *shari'ah* and politics (*ilm al-Fiqh* and laws of the state), (2) the domestic science ('*ilm at-Tadbir al-manzil*') and (3) ethics ('*ilm al-akhlaq*'). These three together comprise '*ilm al-mu'āmalah*'. Al-Ghazālī regards these not only as useful for man's life in this world, but also considers them to be bearing fruits for man's life after death, for, with the correct understanding and management of worldly affairs man's conduct in society is beneficial for himself in both the worlds and is conducive to general well-being of humanity. In these sciences man makes use of his perception and reasoning faculty but these are subordinated to the dictates of revelation.<sup>2</sup>

The theoretical knowledge, in the view of al-Ghazālī consists of three types of knowledge: (1) metaphysics that is called the first or supreme philosophy (*falsafa-e-ūla* or *al-'ilm al-'ala*); (2)

mathematics that is termed as intermediate or educative sciences (*al-'ilm al-awsaf*) and (3) physical sciences (*al-'ilm at-ṭabi'ah*), considered to be the lowest of sciences. In his view the value of these sciences is that they illuminate our souls with the forms existing, their laws and relations. This illumination helps human soul to acquire perfection and to make use of other beings in this world. He further elaborates the three main division of theoretical knowledge by saying that the first, i.e., the first philosophy (*ma ba'd at-Ṭabi'ah*) is not concerned with material objects but with the Divine Essence and the essence of '*aql*'; some parts of this type of knowledge deal with the categories of existence (*Wajud*), unity and plurality (*Waḥdat wa Kathrat*), potentiality and actuality (*quwwah wa fi'l*), agreement and disagreement, universal and particular (*Kulli wa juz'iy*) etc. The Second type is also not directly concerned with matter but are related to certain qualities and accidents, i.e., forms, quantity, and quality. These can be conceived independent of matter, but for their actual existence are dependent upon matter such as line, triangle, square etc. These are the notions discussed in mathematics. The third type of knowledge is dependent upon matter for both their mental and external existence such as motion and rest. These form the subject matter of physical science.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Ghazālī has divided physical sciences into eight main branches and seven subsidiary branches, details of which may be found in his works.<sup>4</sup> All these sciences illuminate man's mind and soul according to Muslim philosophers in general, but al-Ghazālī makes distinction between them from theological view point as necessary, useful and useless. His elaborate account of logic and particularly the value of syllogism (*qiyas*) and analogy (*tamthil*) is indicative of the influence of Aristotelian logic on him.<sup>5</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah blames Ghazālī for mixing Aristotelian logic with Muslim philosophy for the first time.<sup>6</sup>

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78 (ft. note).

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

6. Hanna al-Fakhārij and Khalil al-Jarr, *Tarikh falsafah dar Jahān-e-Islami*, Persian trans. 'Abd al-Muhammad Ayafi (Tehran: Kitab-e-Zman, second print, 1358 *Shamsi*) p. 117.

2. Al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-Falāṣifah*, (*Khudāmiz Hikmat-e-Misha*) Persian tr. by Dr. Muhammad Khaza'ili, (Tehran: Intisharat-e-Amir Kabir, 1363 *Shamsi*, pp. 75-76.

In case of the knowledge of the 'spiritual world' both reason and sense-perception fail to lead us to any information. In that case the role of revelation and intuition are to be accepted. Al-Ghazālī's special contribution to epistemology lies in his assigning specific roles to the different sources of knowledge. This analysis was not made by any Muslim thinker before him. His theory of knowledge admits the valid claims of reason and experience, and gets them integrated with the higher spiritual yearnings of man at the levels of intuition or its higher form, i.e., revelation.

In connection with the nature of knowledge al-Ghazālī's view is, to some extent, clear. He accepts the things of the 'phenomenal world' as the objects of knowledge. But the question of the status of appearance as against reality i.e. sense-data versus physical objects, is also discussed by al-Ghazālī. By this, he, like the critical realists, wants to say that our perceptual faculties cannot perceive a particular object as it is. The 'Supernal world', according to al-Ghazālī, lies beyond the reach of the majority of men. The object of that world can only be cognized by prophets and mystics. Since the natures of the phenomenal and the spiritual worlds are different, the ways through which they are known cannot be uniform. That is one of the important points which al-Ghazālī making out in his epistemological research.

The problem of justification is the most crucial problem in epistemology. Al-Ghazālī himself also puts stress on the justification of the validity of knowledge. With reference to the validity of empirical and rational knowledge, his stand is, to some extent, similar to that of the exponents of the correspondence and coherence theories of truths or knowledge, respectively.

The difficulty he would, perhaps, face in the justification of the supra-intellectual knowledge, i.e., revealed and intuitive knowledge. These two ways of knowing are very much convincing to al-Ghazālī. Revealed knowledge is the privilege of prophets. Al-Ghazālī being a mystic, finds certainty in the revealed and intuitive knowledge. But what weight they do have in the eyes of non-mystics is a question he did not put attention

to. Al-Ghazālī himself realizes the difficulty of non-mystics in understanding the nature of these two types of knowledge. Because non-mystic will seek intellectual justification of all kinds of knowledge. Al-Ghazālī's point here is that the intuitive and revealed knowledge being different from the intellectual knowledge, there will be no uniformity in the methods of justification of these. Al-Ghazālī would add that the justification or validity of mystic experience can only be understood by those who have morally and spiritually prepared themselves following the *ṣūfī* path.

Post-Ghazālīan Muslim thinkers, were very much influenced by Al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge. It had a great impact on Ibn Ṭufail's (d. 581 A.H./1185 A.D.) theory of knowledge. He, following al-Ghazālī, accepts the role of sense-perception in the acquisition of knowledge of the sensuous objects. According to Ibn Ṭufail, sense-perception, reason and intuition are the bases of philosophical knowledge. He holds that Prophets too have intuitions; their main source of knowledge is revelation from Allah. The knowledge of the prophet is direct and personal, but that of the followers is constituted of testimony.<sup>7</sup>

At the end it can be said that al-Ghazālī's approach to knowledge was a synthetic one as he accommodated sense-perception, reason, their synthesis, and revelation and intuition in his theory of knowledge. This approach of al-Ghazālī makes his epistemology a unique one in the history of philosophy.

7. A. Siddiqi, *Philosophy of Ibn Tufayl*, Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University Press, 1965, pp. 89-93; Sharif, *Op. cit.*, pp. 534-537.

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The author, Dr. Kawthar Mustafa is an Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. He obtained his B.A. Hons. & M.A. degrees in Philosophy from the University of Dhaka in 1980 & 1981 respectively. He joined the Department of Philosophy, Aligarh Muslim University, India as a Research Scholar in 1984 and obtained M.Phil. & Ph.D. degrees in 1987 & 1989 respectively. Late Professor Syed Wahid Akhtar, former Chairman, Department of Philosophy & former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Aligarh Muslim University, was his research supervisor. The title of his Ph.D. thesis is "Symbolism of Light in Sufism with special reference to al-Ghazali's *Mishkat al-Anwar*." Before joining the Department of Philosophy, University of Dhaka in March, 1991, Dr. Mustafa worked as a lecturer in philosophy, in the University of Chittagong. He is currently holding the post of General Secretary of Bangladesh Philosophical Congress. His areas of specialization are Sufism, Philosophy of al-Ghazālī & Comparative Mysticism. Dr. Kawthar Mustafa comes of a spiritual family of Tegharia, P.S. Bajitpur, Dist. Kishoreganj. He is the eldest son of Shah Muhammad Mizanur Rahman Faruqi Abululayee, Sajjadanisheen, Khanqah Abululaiyah, Neelganj Road, Kishoreganj. Dr. Mustafa's mother's name is Zahura Khatun.

# AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

DR. KAWTHAR MUSTAFA

AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE ● DR. KAWTHAR MUSTAFA

**RAMON**